

**Race, Gender and Class in *The Inheritance of Loss* and
*Brick Lane***

A comparative study

by

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**A Thesis Presented to
The Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages
The University of Oslo
In partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Master of Arts Degree
Spring Term 2008**

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Introduction

This thesis will discuss and compare the themes of race, gender and class in *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai¹. My main objective is to explore similarities and differences between the three themes, based on a thorough analysis of characters, settings and plots, and to find out how they correspond and how they differ. The themes of race, gender and class will be seen through the lens of migration and multiculturalism in a postcolonial setting, which is a prevailing theme in the two novels. Furthermore, my focal point will be the question of discrimination and oppression, as these issues are related to all of the three themes. In particular, I am interested in investigating *why* some people are discriminated against, and how literature represents this discrimination. My emphasis will also be on the tense relationship between the East and the West and how the connection between the colonizer and the colonized has influenced this situation. Well-known literary critics will be drawn into the discussion when appropriate. My aim in this thesis is to examine each author's individual approach to the three themes of race, gender and class and to observe if and how these themes are linked together. I would also like to find out how the concept of power influences the three issues differently in the two novels.

The themes of the two novels are interesting to me, both personally and in a global perspective. The concept of gender woke my interest in the autumn of 2006, when I attended the class "Women Writing: Feminist Fiction in English" at the University of Oslo. The focus on the history of female authors, their texts, and the interpretations of these texts by female critics appealed to me and opened up a new way of reading and understanding literature. In particular, I realized how female authors have had to struggle compared to men in order to be recognized and to enter the traditional canon. Based on the literature which was read in class, a connection between gender and the tension between the East and the West was acknowledged. Especially, the examination of *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys caught my interest, together with the interpretations of these novels by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. My interest for these themes developed further, and I therefore decided to join the course "Multicultural American Literature" the following term in order to expand my knowledge. I was also curious to find

¹ All further references to these novels will be given parenthetically by page number. If there is any doubt which novel is referred to, the author's last name will be included in the parentheses.

out if there was a connection between the issues of gender and race. Before the course started I had read *Brick Lane*, and I soon decided to explore the novel further. I was fascinated by Ali's fine characterizations, the challenges of multicultural societies, her vivid writing style and the optimism which prevailed among her female figures. Gradually, I realized that I would like to examine the themes of race, gender and class in this novel and to find out how other contemporary authors approached these concepts. This was the first idea of doing a comparison for my thesis. My choice of a comparative novel finally fell on *The Inheritance of Loss*. Although the two novels focus on different aspects of the three themes, they still have several issues in common.

The two novels comprise themes like migration, multiculturalism, religion, cultural aspects, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. These issues are not new, and they are more relevant than ever in the dynamic picture of the world today. This comparison should therefore be of interest to others as well. Migration has been a major theme throughout history. The reasons for migration have varied, but climatic, social, religious, cultural and financial factors have been important. In general, the common aim of migration has been to improve one's future prospects through education and work. The issues of race, class and gender, are important factors in this connection. After decolonization, many people from the Third World and former colonized countries migrated to the West in order to secure a better future for themselves and their families back home. From the industrialized countries' point of view, the immigrants have helped out in an increasing demand for labour. However, the multicultural societies of today have also been a challenge. Prejudice and intolerance, especially in connection with differences in race and ethnicity, have been demanding and problematic. Due to variation in cultural and religious background, gender roles have proven difficult in relation to western ideals and other cultures. Finally, the question of class has been of significance – both in respect of professional skills and social status in the country of origin, but also regarding how immigrants settle and integrate into a new country.

Brick Lane and *The Inheritance of Loss* have several aspects in common apart from their major themes. First of all, both novels tell two parallel stories which take place in different parts of the world. *Brick Lane* describes the life and development of two sisters from Bangladesh, Nazneen and Hasina, who part when Hasina elopes and marries the man she loves. Shortly after, Nazneen moves to London to start her married life with Chanu, in a marriage arranged by her father. The setting therefore takes place in both Bangladesh, mostly Dhaka, and Brick Lane, a street in Tower Hamlets in London. In *The Inheritance of Loss*,

Desai tells the story of Sai who lives with her grandfather, a retired judge, in Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas and at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga. At the same time, Desai reveals the life of Biju, the cook's son in the judge's household, who works as an illegal immigrant in New York. Apart from these settings the reader is introduced to innumerable countries and peoples, in particular in *The Inheritance of Loss* where Desai gives vivid descriptions of multicultural societies from the whole world. Furthermore, the character of Gyan in *The Inheritance of Loss* introduces the reader to some of the history of Nepal. Thus, the setting of the two novels is in both the East and the West, a distinction which will be of major significance for this analysis. In particular the tension between these different parts of the world will be in focus and linked up with the three major themes of race, class and gender. Through the technique of telling two parallel stories and introducing the issues of the East and the West, both Ali and Desai expand their narratives into larger socio-political as well as historical subjects.

In order to fully understand the importance of the various geographical settings and personal characteristics, it will be useful to obtain some brief historical facts regarding the countries in question, in particular the countries of South Asia. At the end of the nineteenth century the British Empire reached the height of its success; it had territories all over the globe and authority over a quarter of the world's population. Throughout the world today there is ample evidence of the influence of British institution and culture, and English is the main international language. This is partly due to the legacy of the Empire but also because of America's size and power. India was the most important territory in the British Empire, as it secured the sea routes (and routes overland) from Britain to India and the Far East (Randle 121). This information confirms that both England and America are powerful nations of the West – England as the classical imperialistic nation that gained power through the control of geographical and territorial countries, and America which has obtained power through the control of the financial markets of the world. In contrast to these privileged countries, Ali and Desai introduce the reader to countries of the Third World: India, Bangladesh and to some extent Nepal. India gained its independence August 15, 1947, which was a key moment of the decolonization of the 20th century. At the same time, the present nation of India was born of the partition of the former British Indian Empire into two new countries: the secular India, and Pakistan which was based on former Muslim majority areas. Up until the end of WWII, Bangladesh was a part of the British colony of India. Between 1947 and 1971, Bangladesh ("the land of Bengal") formed the eastern part of Pakistan and was called East Pakistan ("Bangladesh" *The Encyclopedia Americana*). However, many problems arose between East

and West Pakistan, mainly because of the ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences between them. The problems developed and proved difficult to deal with, and in 1971 the eastern part of Pakistan separated and became the republic of Bangladesh. Thus, these South Asian countries reflect different but also shared historical experiences (“Pakistan” *The Encyclopedia Americana*). Particularly violent and painful were the partitions of India and Pakistan in 1947 and of West Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971. Nepal is an independent kingdom situated south of the great Himalayan Range. It is bordered by Tibet to the north, India to the west and south and Sikkim to the east. The ethnic makeup of Nepal has been determined largely by its location between central Asia and India, and the Nepali population is mainly the result of large-scale migrations from these areas. Hinduism, blended with older religious practices in certain areas, is the dominant religion of Nepal (“Nepal” *The Encyclopedia Americana*). Common for the countries in South Asia are that they, to various extents, have been under British influence, and that they today are highly populated countries with a high level of poverty and illiteracy. However, these aspects are starting to change now, and in particular India has seen some improvement over the recent years.

As mentioned, both novels belong to the postcolonial period. There are many definitions of how this complex period can be defined, but I have found the one given by the Indian-American postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha particularly useful for this thesis:

Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the “rationalizations” of modernity. (438)

This definition include the most central themes in *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, as both novels focus on exactly the uneven development of the East and the West, presented through the authorial techniques of telling two parallel stories in each novel. Furthermore, the definition includes the important concept of power, “the contest for political and social authority”, which often is linked to the concepts of race, gender and class. Finally, the definition confirms the injustice which is visible in the case of the disadvantaged from countries of the Third World. In his essay *The Survival of Culture*, Bhabha adds: “In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have

suffered the sentence of history-subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement-that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking” (438). This statement is of significance to this analysis because it links up with the theories and thoughts of Spivak which will be discussed.

Naturally, postcolonial literature reflects both historical aspects and the consequences of imperialism. In *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, colonial matters are often referred to. The character of Chanu frequently gives “history lessons” in which he draws the attention to the injustice and harm the English have caused. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai provides countless hints and images alluding to these facts. Often, these references are made in a figurative language. An example is when Sai turns up at Gyan’s home. There she is met by the sight of chickens being hurt and raped by the rooster. This image figuratively refers to the colonial situation, where the rooster represents the English and the chickens the Indians: “The birds had never revealed themselves to her so clearly; a grotesque bunch, rape and violence being enacted, hens being hammered and pecked as they screamed and flapped, attempting escape from the rapist rooster” (256). This scene illustrates the helplessness and vulnerability of the Indians in a colonial situation.

Ali and Desai have many characteristic features in common, both professionally and regarding their personal backgrounds. Although they come from different countries, Bangladesh and India respectively, they can both be categorized as South Asian diaspora authors. In this respect, their tasks as authors are of vital importance. Their project is to give voice to people, in particular women, who are oppressed due to race, gender and class - people who through history have been unable to express themselves. Through their novels they communicate the oppression their characters have to face. History serves as basis for their arguments. Hence, as diaspora authors Ali and Desai build bridges between the First World and the Third World. They both have personal experiences of migration, as they moved to the West as children where they were educated. They are young, female, contemporary authors who have written bestsellers and have won awards for their texts. Finally, they have written realistic texts which either can be read on a superficial level or as novels which reveal a complex and deeper psychological pattern. In order to better understand their texts, it will be useful to have a closer look at their lives and works individually.

Monica Ali, born in 1967, is a British writer of Bangladeshi origin. She is the daughter of a British mother and a Bangladeshi father. Her parents met in England where her father studied in the mid 1960’s. Later on, the couple moved to Dhaka where they were married. When the civil war broke out in 1971, her mother managed to return to Bolton, England, with

her two children. Ali was then three years old, and her brother five. Her father managed to join them later (Lane “Ali’s in wonderland”). At first, the situation was considered temporary – when the war was over, the family planned to return to Dhaka. However, the family settled in their new environment: the children settled into school, they stopped speaking to their father in Bengali and they “stopped even understanding”. After this there was no plan “to go home” (“Where I’m coming from”). These biographical elements can be easily recognized in *Brick Lane*.

After studying Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford, Ali started to work with marketing for two small publishing houses. Later on, she worked at a design and branding agency. It was when her first child was just under a year old that she started to write short-stories in a writing group on the Internet. However, Ali soon felt the short-story format constraining, and she realized that she really wanted to write a novel. In 2003 her first novel, *Brick Lane*, was published, a book which took her 18 months to write (Lane “Ali’s in wonderland”). In an interview with Bookwire, Ali is asked if there was any personal family history included in *Brick Lane*, or if she had to do research. Ali replies:

All of the above. I’m sure everybody will tell you the same thing. You are always drawing from your own experience. So with every character you’re writing about, you’re writing about a part of yourself... The concept of the generations in an immigrant community is something I lived with myself and experienced. Then I did do research as well... There is another aspect which is my father’s storytelling. He grew up in Bangladesh and tells stories of village life. I wanted to preserve some of that for my own children. (Sakaria “Meet the author”)

Ali was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2003, and was voted Granta’s Best Young British Novelist on the basis of the unpublished manuscript. Her second novel, *Alentejo Blue*, was published in 2006.

Brick Lane has caused some controversies within the Bangladeshi community in England. Ali has been accused of giving a negative portrayal of people from Bangladesh; in particular, people from the Sylhet region have felt insulted. They feel that they have been characterized as both uneducated and unsophisticated. When the film of the novel was first planned, some 120 members of the Bangladeshi community in London marched in protest (Cacciottolo “Brick Lane protesters hurt over ‘lies’”). In spite of this, however, the film was completed in 2007.

Kiran Desai was born in India in 1971. She was fifteen years old when she left for England with her mother, Anita Desai, who is also a well-known author. After a year they

moved to the USA, where Desai has lived since. Today she is part of the Indian diaspora and she is a citizen of India and a Permanent Resident of the United States.

Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, was published in 1998, when she was still a creative writing student at Colombia University. For this novel she won the Betty Trask Award. Her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, which appeared in 2006, took her almost eight years to complete. For this novel she won the 2006 Man Booker Prize, and she is the youngest female writer ever to win this prestigious prize. She also won the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award for this book. The specific setting of the novel is of major significance, and in an interview, Desai is asked why she chose Kalimpong. Desai replies that she spent parts of her childhood there with an aunt, at a place called Cho Oyu (!), and that she “wanted to capture what it means to grow up in such a fascinating environment, with such wonderfully disparate people.” Hence, also in the case of Desai, her personal experiences have influenced her novel (Singh “Kiran Desai Interview”).

Although this thesis mainly focuses on content, it is interesting to see that also some formal features of the two literary works are quite similar. Both *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are written in a third-person narrative perspective. This implies that the narrator is not a participant in the story or a part of the plot. Furthermore, this external narrator is omniscient, which indicates that the narrator knows everything about the inner thoughts and feelings of the various characters. An omniscient narrator like this, who throughout the novels knows what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future, is considered to be absolutely reliable (Lothe 36). An example of this is given in *Brick Lane*, when the narrator in the beginning of the story tells what will happen later on:

So that when, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (16)

This technique opens up to a variety of possibilities to express and discuss the themes, characters and plots. The reader gets to know how the characters think, how they consider the world around them, and how they see themselves. It is also interesting to note how the various characters comment on each other. This again shapes the various characters’ actions and their speech. In this way the characters become familiar even though they do not say very much. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, both the judge and Sai are of few words – still their inner thoughts and feelings are available to the reader. This is also relevant for Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, who keeps many thoughts to herself. Chanu, on the other hand, talks a lot - he holds nothing back.

Also regarding the diction and tone of voice, the novels have aspects in common. Both *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are written in a down-to-earth, everyday language and give a realistic picture of the various events which are described. Even when discussing major universal themes like history, politics, finances, religion and cultural aspects, this tone of voice is used. Hence, the tone is undramatic and calm, in spite of the fact that many tragic events are portrayed. The vocabulary is moderate - none of the characters, except Nazneen's mother, seem to complain even when they experience dramatic and frightening situations.

The appeal to the senses, figurative language and the use of animals and scenery to describe character and themes are some of the features which characterize the style of both *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. First of all, both authors tend to use the senses of the characters to promote moods and thoughts. Both Nazneen and Biju can smell "home" when they are longing for it. In particular, this is visible in *Brick Lane*: "The village was leaving her. Sometimes a picture would come. Vivid; so strong she could smell it" (217). The strong feelings between Nazneen and Hasina are described in the same sensitive way: "What was Hasina doing? This thought came to her all the time. *What is she doing right now?* It was not even a thought. It was a feeling, a stab in the lungs" (22). From the reader's point of view this technique makes the language vivid and it emphasizes and supports the various themes and characterizations. Also Desai uses many examples of figurative language in her novels. The judge is described as a lizard: "There was more than a hint of reptile in the slope of his face, the wide hairless forehead, the introverted nose, the introverted chin, his lack of movement, his lack of lips, his fixed gaze" (33). In this comparison between the judge and a reptile, the introverted physical features of the judge reflect his inwardly directed, selfish feelings. Finally, the use of scenery, in particular the repetitive visualization of Kanchenjunga, frames important aspects of Desai's novel. The mountains are solid, permanent and beautiful and represent something fundamental and positive - even when the riots and violence start. Furthermore, Kanchenjunga is mentioned both on the first and the last page, and thereby frames the plot.

The titles of the novels are informative and realistic and they thereby fit the content of the texts. The title of *Brick Lane* is straightforward and enlightening as it frames the setting - a street in London. This is the place where Nazneen feels lonely and passive in the beginning of the novel, but also the place where she feels confident and independent in the end. Thus, for Nazneen, Brick Lane stands for possibilities which she could not have obtained in Bangladesh. In the end, when she has the choice to leave, she therefore decides to stay on. The title of *The Inheritance of Loss* is more complex but still informative and realistic. First of

all, the title can relate to the loss Sai feels as an orphan. Also Sai's mother experienced a corresponding loss when *her* mother, Nimi, died when she was a little girl. However, the title can also be interpreted in a different way. The novel soon reveals that it deals with themes related to the postcolonial period, and that it examines the inheritance from the British Empire in India. It tells the story of those who stayed on in India and those who migrated. Whereas the title of *Brick Lane* is neutral, the title of *The Inheritance of Loss* gives negative associations by the use of the word "loss". The title therefore reflects an important aspect of the novel: "Could fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss?" (2). The theme of loss is present throughout the novel, in particular in the sense of losing one's pride and respect. The title suggests what will follow - in the end of the novel most of the characters lose what they had in the beginning. Finally, it is interesting to note that Ali also reflects upon the loss of pride. Twice in *Brick Lane* Chanu refers to this state: "'A loss of pride', he said, talking to the wall, 'is a terrible thing.'" (187) and "'Take pride, or all is lost'" (215).

The methods used to analyze *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are mainly close reading and comparative techniques. Close reading has been absolutely necessary to me when exploring these novels, as both texts are contemporary and only small amounts of secondary material exist. However, I have also been drawing on some secondary material like postcolonial and feminist theory, as these discourses have been useful in terms of expanding my knowledge of the themes, definitions and reflections. My major focus has been on Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who are central figures in this respect. However, also Toril Moi, T. Minh-ha Trinh, David Henry Hwang and Charlotte Brontë have been valuable when dealing with the various themes. My literary analysis is structured around quotes from the texts, looking for meaning inside the text itself. This technique does not only involve the understanding of the printed text at a superficial level, but it also requires the recognition of the author's message to the reader. This message is promoted by the use of vocabulary, imagery, personal characterizations, sentence construction, how the story is told and the importance of plot and setting. In this thesis, contradictions and similarities of the two novels are in focus. Regarding the structure, I will examine the three themes of race, gender and class in their separate chapters. Each chapter will start with a brief introduction to the theme in question in order to clarify central terms and aspects, followed by a thorough analysis of the theme. For this purpose I will choose the novel which I find most suitable to promote the central issues. For chapter 1, which discusses the theme of race, *The Inheritance of Loss* will be my fundamental text. In the discussion of gender in chapter 2, *Brick Lane* will serve as my basis. With the respective text as starting

point for my discussions, I will then move on to the process of comparing with the other novel. The method used in chapter 3 regarding class is somewhat different from the others. In this case the four different places where the various plots are revealed, Dhaka, London, Kalimpong and New York, will be discussed and compared consecutively with a focus on the psychological impacts of class societies and class structure.

In chapter 1, the main focus will be to analyze the theme of race and ethnicity in the two novels and to explore how these issues are related to discrimination. The question of inner qualities, like personal strength and characteristic personal features, as well as external factors, like historical and cultural aspects, will be discussed. Distinctions between the East and the West, colonialism and the postcolonial period, will prevail throughout. Chapter 2 will deal with gender issues, and the female characters of the two novels will be in focus. There will be an attempt to show how the relationship between the East and the West are linked to femininity and masculinity. The issues of cultural and religious aspects will be important. The chapter will pay attention to what the various characters long for, what possibilities they have and how they struggle towards independence from male power. The last thematic chapter, chapter 3, will discuss the theme of class. The various settings and the hierarchical distinctions between individuals and groups will be the focal point. Both the physical and psychological impacts of class systems will be discussed and compared.

Chapter 1: The Theme of Race

1.1 The theme of race in *The Inheritance of Loss*

Introductory remarks

The theme of race is one of the major issues in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*. In order to be able to analyze how the concept of race is approached in these novels, it will therefore be necessary to have a closer look at how the term is defined. The term race has proven complex to define, as both the aspect of time as well as specific ways of grouping races are continually being discussed. Still, it is of vital importance for my discussion that a general definition is presented. According to Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, a professor of anthropology, “race is now viewed as a social construction that is primarily recognized by physical appearance, or phenotype” (1). Further, Fluehr-Lobban confirms that such features can be a person’s skin colour, hair form, facial features such as shape of nose and lips, eye form and height (1). Although this definition is based on the American society, it will still serve the purpose for my discussion as it is considered a scientifically acknowledged interpretation of the term. As a consequence of the dynamic and ever changing concept of race, substitutes and/or linked terms often appear. Examples of this can be expressions like ethnicity, nationality, culture, background, origin, language and identity. Sometimes such alternative terms can be helpful and make the message more precise, whereas other times substitute terms can confuse the comprehension. Thus, in this thesis the definition by Fluehr-Lobban will serve as a foundation for my arguments.

The concept of ethnicity is also important for my discussion, as the considerable division between Sai and Gyan in *The Inheritance of Loss* is more ethnic than racial. In order to understand Sai and Gyan’s different way of thinking, it will therefore be necessary to define this term. In contrast to biologically oriented approaches, the term ethnicity suggests that race is a *social* matter (Omi and Winant 15). In other words, ethnicity can be said to be the sociological expression of culture – it is derived from socially ascribed identity as well as self-identity (Fluehr-Lobban 17). Omi and Winant claim that there are three paradigmatic approaches to race and race relations: ethnicity, class and nation. Ethnicity has been the dominant paradigm of race for the last half-century, but has, since this theory emerged in the 1920’s, also been challenged by the two other theories of class and nation. However, in the 1970’s the ethnicity paradigm resurged, a paradigm which demands group rights and

recognition. In this thesis the term of race and ethnicity will be closely linked to aspects of multiculturalism, migration, integration, discrimination and power. It will also be related to the personal features of longing, possibilities, hopes and dreams for the future.

A discussion of the themes of race and ethnicity demands a clear distinction between the issue of race and that of racism. Whereas race describes, distinguishes, and classifies racial or phenotypic differences among humans, racism evaluates that difference, ranking it into superior and inferior types (Fluehr-Lobban 20). As mentioned, ethnicity is about culture, and it follows that ethnocentrism is the ideology that one's culture or ethnic group is at the centre of one's worldview. Ethnocentrism is about culture, as racism is about race (Fluehr-Lobban 21). In the following I will discuss how these concepts apply to the characters of *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*.

Discrimination due to race and ethnicity is usually quite visible in society. However, there are types of race intolerance which are not that obvious or exposed. Examples of this can involve setting conditions or requirements which a smaller group of people cannot meet, that certain groups of people are not given the same possibilities, or the simple fact that minority groups do not feel included. These issues can be difficult to recognize, but still they are present and can make life difficult for the people in question. In my discussion, I will try to cover all aspects of this challenging issue. Through the main characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, in particular Jemubhai, Desai shows how discrimination due to race can influence and wound, and in some cases, even destroy the human mind. However, as I will argue, discrimination due to race and ethnicity can also be closely related to the question of individual personality, i.e. how the effect of racism influences the individual mind differently. Personality is regarded as a combination of genetics and influences from the environment. I will therefore also discuss how people who are discriminated against react differently. The individual approach to how an immigrant feels about his or her situation is important as to how successfully an immigrant or a foreigner manages to settle in a new society.

The experiences of Jemubhai also expand the theme of race into a universal subject. As a parallel to his personal experiences, the reader recognizes a pattern of white, imperial superiority and power and how people from colonized countries are not accepted or welcomed into the western "world". In the same way as Jemubhai is discriminated against due to his dark skin and Third World origins, the white Europeans continually prove their superiority in a universal perspective. The whites have gained power and dominance, and they demand to be treated with respect and dignity. On a universal level this leads to poverty, humiliation and discrimination of people from colonized countries. Many critics have been interested in these

crucial, typical postcolonial views, that the white, powerful and rich west feels superior to the submissive and poor Third World countries. Edward Said's *Orientalism* from 1978 has been pioneering as such. In his introduction he claims: "My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage-and even produce-the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said "Orientalism" 3).

This statement is too extensive to discuss in detail in this thesis, but a definition of the terms "orient" and "oriental" will be relevant and useful. Several critics have made an effort to define this area geographically, but found this difficult. This is exactly in accordance with the thoughts of Said, who preferred to think of the Orient as something different from the West. The West can be described as "a historical rather than a geographical construct. It means developed, industrialized, urbanized capitalist secular, and modern" (Lazarus 129). Based on this, the understanding of the term "Orient" will represent what is "not Europe" but rather the "Other": "The Orient is ... also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said "Orientalism" 1). Thus, for practical purposes when discussing the themes of race and ethnicity, the term "the West" will be linked to Europe and America while "the East" will be associated with "the Orient" or what is "not European and/or American". Further, it is important to be aware that the West has needed the Orient not only for military and financial purposes, but also as a dream of the dangerous, romantic, mystical and sensual – a place where rich people from the West could go to develop their personality (Said "Orientalismen, Vestlige oppfatninger" xv).

Jemubhai's hate

"*The judge was thinking of his hate*" (165). Although these reflections appear to Jemubhai's mind as a retired judge, the feeling of hate has been present in most of his adult life. Through painful moments Jemubhai revisits his past, and, retrospectively told, the reader is gradually introduced to his life and learns how and why his life turned out the way it did. Through Desai's description of Jemubhai's life, she illustrates how race discrimination can influence and harm the personality of an innocent and naïve young man. The turning point in Jemubhai's life takes place in 1939, when he moves to Cambridge, England to study for five years. It is during this period of time that he learns what hate and racism are. At first, Jemubhai's hate is directed towards all other human beings, but, later on, the feeling of hate

also includes himself and his own personality. The dominant feeling of hate transforms Jemubhai into a cruel man. The farewell with his father before he leaves India gives the reader the bitter taste of what will come: “Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn’t adulterated by another, contradictory emotion” (37).

It is Jemubhai’s intelligence and cleverness at school, together with the dowry from the family of his new wife, which makes it possible for him to study law in England. Naturally, England is a cultural shock to him. In the same way, the English find it difficult to accept a dark skinned young man with an alien cultural background and a peculiar accent. In 1939 India was still dominated by the British Empire, and in the same way Jemubhai’s fellow students from England feel superior to him on the individual level. Jemubhai arrives in England before the stream of immigration from earlier colonized countries in the fifties and sixties, when foreigners were still rare (Herrmann 468). Feeling rejected, he soon withdraws from all social activities: “He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow” (39). After a while, he also becomes a stranger to himself: he finds his own skin colour odd, his accent unpleasant and he is terrified by the thought of being different: “Eventually he felt barely human at all” (40).

Through this passage Desai illustrates how the process of internalization, the incorporation into the self of the attitudes and standards of others (Sutherland 230), can work on the human mind. Through learning and accepting the norms and attitudes of the English, Jemubhai gradually understands how these issues can be valuable to him, and finally he regards them as his own viewpoints. In this way Jemubhai becomes a victim of internalized oppression; he starts to believe that the discrimination against him is justified. Through the process, Jemubhai soon learns how to use the methods of his oppressors towards himself. Being ignored, he therefore loses his self-esteem and starts to hate his own body and personality. His loneliness and self-hatred soon develop into mental instability, and his mind is troubled and hurt. The fear of being different and humiliated becomes so strong that he starts to powder his skin in a white/pinkish colour to hide his own. The habit becomes an obsession for him for the rest of his life. This irresistible routine is important because it illustrates that Jemubhai starts to hide his original identity and takes on a new one. Further, it symbolizes that he puts on a masque, the masque of whiteness. This indicates that he starts to adopt the features of the white man, who he admires. Taking into consideration that the whites have discriminated and humiliated him, this suggests that this masque of whiteness is also a masque of cruelty. The fact that Jemubhai is reproducing the cruelty of those people who have

been cruel to him, emphasizes the power and dominance of the white people. Thus, the race discrimination that Jemubhai is exposed to during his years in Cambridge hurts him for life, as he turns it all inward. His emotional feelings will never recover.

After five years in England, Jemubhai returns to India feeling like a stranger: “He was a foreigner-*a foreigner*-every bit of him screamed” (166-167). In addition, he is ridiculed because of his westernized way of life and in particular for the obsession with powdering his face. Unable to suppress his negative feelings and experiences, he wants to see the same feelings in someone else. In psychological terms this act is often referred to as projection, “a defence mechanism in which a person conceals from himself that he has a trait or disposition of which he is unconsciously ashamed, by falsely seeing its presence in others” (Sutherland 365-366). In this way he transfers his misery to his nineteen-year-old wife Nimi, in order to ease his own troubled mind. Their marriage becomes a challenge for both of them. His frustrations, his temperament and his hate destroy Nimi’s life. It is upon his return from England that Jemubhai’s perverse and sadistic mistreatment of Nimi begins, as he also decides to “teach her the same lessons of loneliness and shame he had learned himself” (170). He also mentally abuses her, he gives her an English name in an attempt to change her identity, and he forces her to learn English and behave in a western manner even though she does not want to cooperate. Her refusal to do as he pleases maddens him, and gradually he breaks her down. In the end he humiliates her, his own family and hers by “sending her back”, and she spends her last days together with a sister and a brother-in-law until she dies in “an accident” (307). In spite of the fact that Jemubhai always disguised his terrible behaviour, “the grotesqueness of it all shocked him” (169-170). “Yet he repeated the gutter act again and again...cruelty to her became irresistible” (170). Thus again, Desai stresses the terrible consequences of race discrimination and the problems which are related to colonialism, in particular the question of identity. Jemubhai’s confusion regarding his own identity is evident, and consequently he gives himself an alternative name with the same initials as his own, James Peter Peterson (171).

Through Desai’s characterization of Jemubhai and also through her illustrations of the discrimination he suffers in England, Desai stresses several points. First of all, and based on the above, Desai shows that discrimination is a gruesome human act which can lead to severe consequences for the ones who suffer. In a larger perspective, Desai illustrates how Jemubhai himself is a victim of colonialism. He is brought up to see the wealth and power of the British and that loyalty to this nation pays, both socially and professionally. However, when he tries to approach the British system of education in England, he is met with prejudice and

intolerance. Then he fully realizes that he is not welcome and that he never will be “one of them”. From the English point of view, the examples discussed show how the English feel it natural to oppress individuals like Jemubhai due to their colonial position. They feel that Jemubhai is less worthy than themselves and look upon him as an intruder who wants to benefit from their advantageous society. Thus, just like India has suffered under the British Empire in a global perspective, Jemubhai suffers as an individual, unable to improve his own situation. In more general terms, this situation can be seen as a parallel to the traditional view that the white, powerful and rich west feels superior to the submissive and poor Third World countries. These are the main reasons why Jemubhai is filled with hate. He is confused regarding his own identity, and does not feel at home in either England or in India. This is a common consequence when a nation interferes and takes the power in another country. At a national level situations like this can lead to confusion regarding national loyalty.

Finally, the experiences of Jemubhai illustrate the destructive consequences of racism, seen as a continuous process where the oppressed suffer so badly that his or her only knowledge of dealing with life is to discriminate others in the same way. Thus, the process of discrimination, internalization and projection seems to be a continuous process where each factor is closely linked to the others. It can be compared to a circle which proves almost impossible to break for those who suffer. Further, Jemubhai’s discrimination of Nimi is based on gender as well as his spite for her race. In this case he behaves like the physical strong “white” man who uses his male dominance to punish Nimi who is weak, passive and submissive. Nimi is obedient in this situation, and follows him “as wives in those days followed their husbands” (166). As a parallel to this, the reader can recognize the traditional pattern of the powerful West and the oppressed East in terms of both race and gender.

Sai and Gyan, their search for identity and belonging, and the problem of ethnicity

Jemubhai’s story has been discussed in detail to show how discrimination can work on the human mind. However, his life and personality are also important in understanding the character of his granddaughter Sai. As her only kin he plays an important role both genetically and as part of her family background. Sai’s surroundings are characterized by aspects of migration, cross-cultural aspects and the heritage from a colonial India. Her parents are Indian, but early in Sai’s childhood they move to Moscow where her father has been picked out as a possible candidate for the Intercosmos Program (25). Sai is left behind to be raised and educated at a convent, where she learns that “cake was better than *laddoos*, fork spoon knife better than hands” and that “English was better than Hindi” (30).

When she is suddenly orphaned as a young girl, the retired judge decides to take care of her at Cho Oyu. The judge had Cho Oyu built when he wanted to retire, and in accordance with his taste for the West, a Scotsman designed and built it (28). The isolation of the property also suits the judge. Once it was majestic, but now it is crumbling. Just like the British Empire, Cho Oyu “had its past if not its future” (257). After her arrival, Sai’s western-oriented upbringing is further strengthened, as two elderly Anglophile Indian sisters, Noni and Lola, develop a close friendship with her. Noni and Lola live nearby at Mon Ami, and Noni is employed by the judge to be Sai’s private tutor (34). The nearest neighbour of Cho Oyu is Uncle Potty who is from England, and his friend Father Booty from Switzerland. Hence, Sai’s little world consists of people with a multicultural background, influenced by features from the West. The exception is the cook at Cho Oyu who is Indian like herself. The cook and Sai grow very close, and he teaches her about India and Indian ways of life. However, despite their closeness at the surface, they are both able to sense the difference between them deeper down:

Sai felt embarrassed. She was rarely in the cook’s hut, and when she did come searching for him and enter, he was ill at ease and so was she, something about their closeness being exposed in the end as fake, their friendship composed of shallow things conducted in a broken language, for she was an English-speaker and he was a Hindi-speaker. (19)

This quote is important because it confirms the identity problems in postcolonial India. It also confirms the difference in class between the privileged Indians who are influenced by the West and “the others”.

Naturally, Sai’s background and surroundings influence her life and personality. For where does this girl belong who is Indian by birth and who looks Indian but who is brought up in accordance with English customs in a multicultural, westernized society? Very gradually, and in particular through her romance with Gyan, she learns about this difficult question. When Sai is sixteen, she meets a young student of accounting, a descendent of a Nepali Gorkha merchant. Gyan is employed by her grandfather to teach her science and math. They soon fall in love and an intense relationship develops. However, as a parallel to their romance, the GNLF, the Gorkha National Liberation Front, develops. The main aim of the GNLF is to create a separate Gorkha state in the Nepali-speaking area. Gyan joins this group, and the dramatic turning point in their relationship is when Gyan betrays Sai, the judge and the cook in order to get hold of the weapons he knows are kept in the house. Thus, Sai’s search for identity becomes important to her when she tries to understand Gyan’s betrayal. Thus, the betrayal makes Sai aware of their ethnic differences: “‘You hate me’, said Sai, as if

she'd read his thoughts, 'for big reasons, that have nothing to do with me. You aren't being fair'" (260).

At this stage, the interesting question is why a young, educated man like Gyan decides to join a violent political group like the GNLF. In order to understand this it will be necessary to have a closer look at his background and future possibilities. First of all, Gyan is frustrated because he is not able to get a proper job. He also reflects upon the suffering the Nepalese of India have gone through during their history, in particular the oppression by other dominant nations and the consequent financial difficulties. Coming from a family of warriors, he realizes that the Nepalese of India have fought on behalf of the British for two hundred years. Later on, when the regiments were divided at independence, those who stayed fought in the same way for India (158). It also becomes clear to him why he is unable to speak to his father and why he has felt ashamed to let anyone see his home (160). "He hated his tragic father, his mother who looked to him for direction, had always looked to him for direction, even when he was a little boy, simply for being male" (260). This quote shows a family situation where suppression connected to issues of ethnicity, gender and class is a part of every-day life. Hence, his cultural background, the poor conditions of his family and the bad prospects of his own future, make Gyan embarrassed by his romance with Sai and what she represents: "It was a masculine atmosphere and Gyan felt a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda, the cheese toast, queen cakes from the baker, and even worse, the small warm space they inhabited together, the nursery talk-" (161). He feels he has to reject her westernized and bourgeois lifestyle. Through his betrayal he risks the life of his lover, her grandfather and the cook. Thus, in the same way Gyan feels that the Indian people with Nepalese background have been discriminated against due to ethnicity, he now uses discrimination as a weapon himself. In this respect he is like the judge. From more or less one day to another, he dramatically betrays his girlfriend, well aware that the outcome might be death for the members of the Cho Oyu household. Through this scene Desai illustrates how oppression due to ethnicity can work, both on the global and the personal level.

The theme of race, ethnicity and discrimination in the case of Noni, Lola, Uncle Potty and Father Booty

All nations and ethnic groups of people represented in *The Inheritance of Loss* are important as to give a full picture of the issues of race and ethnicity and the challenges of a postcolonial and multicultural society. Through the characters of the two Indian born Anglophile sisters, Noni and Lola, Desai illustrates the complexity of this situation, however,

this time seen from a different angle. Lola and Noni represent the few Indians who have been able to benefit from the British influence. Before she is widowed Lola was married to Joydeep and, as the name of her husband suggests, they were able to enjoy life fully without worries about the future. Together they planned their retirement at the rose-covered cottage Mon Ami in Kalimpong surrounded by beautiful scenery and a nice view of the Himalayas. When Joydeep dies, Lola's unmarried sister Noni moves in with her, and they live on the pension of Lola's husband (41-42). Even though their economy is somewhat reduced from now on, they are basically able to maintain their western lifestyle for many years. Noni helps out by starting to tutor Sai. Regularly, they take trips to England to buy food and clothes, they keep servants, their cupboard is filled with Wedgwood cups and plates and the baker arrives every afternoon with Swiss rolls and queen cakes (66). But also culturally their lives are influenced by England. They prefer British authors, they watch programs and news from the BBC and they celebrate English Christmas. In short, their focus is directed towards England and they are able to enjoy the materialism of the West. Naturally, this extravagant way of life also influences their thoughts about their home country. Lola sees India "as a sinking ship" (47), and advises her daughter Pixie to leave the country when there still is a chance: "...*the doors won't stay open forever...*" (47). Thus, in a postcolonial setting where the differences between rich and poor, the English and the Indians, the whites and the non-whites are distinctive, the sisters are privileged.

When the GNLF takes power in Kalimpong, this situation changes. Usually, when guerrilla groups take control, everyone suffers - regardless of origin and class. The tourists stop coming and businesses have to close down. The water supplies, the electricity and gas for cooking are cut off (237). People in the hillside of Kalimpong can not leave their homes, and innocent people are arrested and tortured on flimsy excuse to state examples (281). All inhabitants are terrified and the difficult situation for the poor people increases. People are starving, and the horror grows day by day. In this chaotic situation the traditional patterns of discrimination, power and wealth are turned upside down. Up until now the few privileged in this area, like Lola and Noni, have been able to live a safe life enjoying their wealth - with a distance to the poor. From now on this situation dramatically changes: people like Lola and Noni are discriminated against, humiliated and ridiculed in the same way as everyone else. They lose most of their property to the GNLF movement, who see their estate as "free land" (240). They are refused food, and they are spit on by Nepali children (280). When Lola visits the head of the organization for the Kalimpong area to discuss her situation, she is humiliated and discriminated against because of her ethnicity, class and gender. Probably for the first

time in her life Lola is able to recognize the poor and understand their difficult situation: “the sisters had never paid much attention for the simple reason that they didn’t have to. It was natural they would incite envy, they supposed, and the laws of probability favored their slipping through life without anything more than muttered comments” (241). Lola realizes how naïve they have been: “when Lola had thought it would continue, a hundred years like the one past...all of a sudden, all that they had claimed innocent, fun, funny, not really to matter, was proven wrong” (241-242). She further understands that:

It *did* matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice and dal country; it *did* matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening, even one that sparked and shocked; it *did* matter to fly to London and return with chocolate filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not. They had pretended it didn’t, or had nothing to do with them, and suddenly it had everything to do with them. (242)

She comprehends that she and Noni no longer will be among those with wealth and privileges, and that they are an attractive target for the GNLF who needs shelter and food for their guerrilla troops. In a larger perspective, through these passages, Desai illustrates the unfortunate consequences of imperialism. The British influence in India developed a society where the differences between the colonizer and the colonized were distinctive in respect of power and wealth. Like other colonized countries that experience a difficult situation for the poor and oppressed, political riots and guerrilla troops trying to take control are not uncommon. In such cases everyone becomes victims of the rioters, regardless of rank and position. Lola realizes that the anger of the Nepalese “had solidified into slogans and guns, and it turned out that they, *they*, Lola and Noni, were the unlucky ones who wouldn’t slip through, who would pay the debt that should be shared with others over many generations” (242). This quote suggests that there is a debt to be paid for the injustice the Nepalese have suffered. In this respect the Nepalese feel a double oppression, both from England and India. Lola now understands that their loyalty to the English will harm them, and that the rioters particularly will enjoy degrading those who have lived a privileged life. The Nepalese feel they can use their gained power to revenge some of the suffering they have been exposed to themselves. Lola realizes that it will take generations to pay for what they as rich and advantageous people owe the poor and oppressed. Finally, on a universal level, this “debt” suggests that it will take generations for India to be free from former British influence and control.

There are two more characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* who are important when discussing race and discrimination in postcolonial India. The characters of Uncle Potty and

Father Booty represent the privileged people from the West living in India. Even though their economy is fading, they are still able to maintain their status and position as wealthy compared to the poor Indian born people in Kalimpong. Uncle Potty's background is from the English upper class: he is from a famous English family, he has studied languages at Oxford, his parents bought two racehorses for themselves as wedding presents (197) and his mother made a trip to Japan only to see the cherry blossoms (107). However, defeated by bad luck and changing times his parents decide to retire to India in order to keep their dignity - here they will be able to live a respectful life maintaining their position and status. Compared to the masses of poor Indians they are still rich and powerful. Having bought his land from the judge years ago, Uncle Potty now spends the rest of his family fortune on liquor (198). On one hand the declining prosperity of Uncle Potty and his family can symbolize the fading colonial power of the English in India. On the other hand, the character of Uncle Potty stresses the status and power of white Europeans in India. This further emphasizes the distinctive differences regarding wealth and power between the West and Third World colonized countries.

Father Booty is from Switzerland and keeps a dairy (41). He and Uncle Potty are best friends and spend their evenings drinking together. The reader is not informed about Father Booty's background, but it is clear that he is also among the privileged Europeans in Kalimpong. Like everyone else, Father Booty suffers when the GNLFF takes control. Having lived in India for forty-five years, he is suddenly found to lack a valid residence permit, and suddenly he is categorized as an illegal immigrant (221). At this stage it is interesting to compare Father Booty's situation with that of Biju, who also lives in a foreign country on illegal terms. Their immigrant experiences are strikingly different. Whereas Father Booty has been able to live a privileged life in India participating in society, Biju has lived a "secret" life in poverty and humiliation. Through this contrast Desai emphasizes the privileges of the white man, who due to race, gender, class and authority often are able to settle in a foreign culture without being suppressed or degraded. Biju, on the other hand, represents the poor disadvantaged people from the Third World, who has to face oppression when approaching the West. As a white, rich man in India Father Booty has never even considered the possibility of being excluded. Due to his race and position, he never felt it necessary to renew his permit. Now, however, this situation is altered. He loses his property and dairy, and he has to leave the country. The GNLFF seems to enjoy making the former privileged suffer, and in the case of Lola, Noni and Father Booty there is also an element of revenge in their decisions. Suddenly they, who have been among the poor and oppressed earlier on, have the power to

make someone else suffer like they have done. Through this revenge they feel that some of the pains and humiliation they have suffered are justified. Thus, in the case of Father Booty, we see a rare example of how a white person living in a Third World country is rejected due to formalities. In most cases, the situation is the opposite, where white powerful people reject people from earlier colonized countries. Consequently, Father Booty also loses his dignity in the end.

Biju and his dream of a better future

The issue of race is vividly described in the case of Biju. During his stay in New York, the reader meets people from the whole world. Through this shift between India and America, Desai is able to draw attention to important differences between the East and the West. Biju is the son of the cook at Cho Oyu, and as a young man he leaves for New York in order to secure the future for himself and his father. His efforts to get a tourist visa for the United States have been both challenging and humiliating for him, and he is well aware that his only possibility is to stay and work illegally. The reader's first meeting with Biju illustrates how he restlessly moves from one illegal ill-paid job to another. He always fears being caught and sent back home by the authorities. The humiliation of continually losing a job is always present: "‘Nothing I can do’, the manager said, pink from having to dole out humiliation to these men...’ Just disappear quietly is my advice....’ So they disappeared" (16). This quote illustrates how the system of illegal immigrants works and how they are being treated. The pink skin colour of the manager suggests the dominance of white people in positions like this, while the workers in the kitchens are mostly dark skinned and of Third World origin. Further, the quote emphasizes how it is a necessity for the undocumented immigrants to be invisible at the surface, and how they become the shadow class of society. In practical terms, this means that they have no rights in the American society, and that they have to accept the jobs, the pay and the poor lodgings and facilities which are offered. In order to keep their jobs, they must never complain or disagree. Financially, the undocumented workers mean a lot to the owners and managers, as especially workers from the Third World are low-cost labour. However, as for example at Pinocchio's Restaurant, where Biju works for a period, the owner's wife prefers illegal workers from the poorer parts of Europe rather than workers from other continents. With European workers she feels she has something in common, like religion and skin-colour. The only problem is that "they weren't coming in numbers great enough or they weren't coming desperate enough" (48). Thus, the theme of race discrimination is present among illegal workers in New York.

The main question of being an immigrant in New York is whether to be legal or not. A legal immigrant can be visible in public life and thereby claim certain rights. The legality also makes it possible to develop both professionally and educationally and to be part of the American social security system. In short, it means to be able to lead a respectable life, to keep one's dignity and to be able to improve and influence one's own situation. The key to this status is to obtain a "United States Permanent Resident card", the so-called Green Card, which is an individual's proof of lawful permanent resident status. Naturally, the desire to get a Green Card is intense for Biju and his fellow workers, and in many cases it becomes an obsession: "Oh, the green card, the green card, the- Biju was so restless sometimes, he could barely stand to stay in his skin" (81). However, at the same time, Biju knows that he cannot apply, because of his race: "...Indians were not able to apply" and further "The line would be stopped up for years, the quota was full, overfull, spilling over" (81). This situation illustrates that people from India wanting permanent resident status in America are being discriminated against due to their race and nationality. In a larger and more general perspective, it could also be claimed that westernized countries discriminate against people from Third World countries by not accepting larger quotas.

Through the character of Biju and his fellow workers, people from a large number of nationalities and races are presented. In this world of illegal immigrants, there exists an invisible but still well-known hierarchy for races and nationalities. In this way people from various nations compare and compete with each other. Thus, the concept of race is very much present among the illegal immigrants, and Biju suffers in a system like this. He is aware of the fact that he, as an Indian, is not allowed to apply for the immigration lottery every year, as "Indians were not allowed to apply...on and on the list went, but no, no Indians" (81). From other kitchens he also learns that Indians are not a well liked group (77). Biju feels both depressed and angry by his situation. He feels there is no future for him in America in spite of his hard work, his poor living conditions and the humiliation to which he is exposed. However, in spite of the injustice he feels himself, it is interesting to see that Biju also has prejudice for people of other races and nationalities. In particular this is relevant for people from Pakistan, whom he has been brought up to hate. Biju's father is therefore very upset when he learns that Biju is working together with Pakistanis: "Beware. Beware. Keep away. Distrust" (22). Again, an example of how ethnic discrimination can work is given.

In *The Inheritance of Loss* several characters are victims of discrimination – still they are discriminating others. The significance of this is important, as it keeps the mentioned hierarchy based on races and ethnicity going. Further, the hierarchy illustrates a categorization

according to ability and status and also a power structure. In practical terms this means that in order to work oneself up in the hierarchy, one has to press someone else down or aside. The top of the hierarchy is for the few, the bottom part is for the masses of people who, for different reasons, are not able to climb the social ladder. It is difficult to claim that Buji is being discriminated only due to his race, as he is in New York on illegal terms. He is also well aware of his status, both before he leaves his home country and through his working experience in America. However, it is obvious that he is involved in race related issues. On the other hand, the fact that Indians are not able to apply for the Green Card or in the yearly immigration lottery, is clearly discrimination.

1.2 A comparison of the theme of race in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*

Introductory remarks

So far, I have used *The Inheritance of Loss* as the fundamental text for my discussion of the theme of race and ethnicity. I will now compare relevant issues and characters with *Brick Lane*. The character of Biju will serve as a bridge to the character of Chanu, as they have several features in common. Both leave their home countries as young, unmarried men in order to create a new future in the West. In this respect it is interesting to see how the two novels' styles and structure, in terms of telling two parallel narratives, reinforce important themes, characterizations and plots. The female characters in *Brick Lane* will only be mentioned to emphasize important points, as their immigrant experiences will be discussed together with gender-related matters in chapter 2. The aspects of place, time, and integration, together with the question of racism and individual personality will be in focus.

Setting

The destination for Jemubhai and Chanu is England, while Biju struggles to build a future in America. Even though these countries are different, even on different continents, both countries can be categorized as representing the western world. However, the picture is complex as aspects of geography, history, culture and religion are different for each of the countries. Both Bangladesh and India have been influenced by the British Empire. The interesting issue now will be to look at the power structure of America - can it in any way be compared to the imperial powers of England? Today, America is considered to be a new imperial power. However, in contrast to England, which is the classical example of imperialism based on gained geographical territory, America has gained power through the

world wide control of economy and markets. This is usually referred to as neo-imperialism, and often it also involves political control (Scherr Converation). Thus, even though the power structure of England and America is different, the impact is much the same: both countries have had or still have the opportunity to control people of other nations, countries and groups. Desai gives an example of how the difference between England and America can be seen in *The Inheritance of Loss*. For a while Bijju works at Brigitte's restaurant in New York's financial district. His fellow dishwasher Achootan, who has also lived in Canterbury for some years, describes the difference like this: "But at least this county is better than England", he said. 'At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief. There they shout at you openly on the street, 'Go back to where you came from'" (134-135). This example suggests a more open and direct discrimination against foreigners in England than in America, but the intolerance against people from the Third World still seems to be the same in practical terms. Thus, the characters of Jemubhai, Chanu and Bijju, are all met with scepticism by their new countrymen, independent of the country they approach.

Integration and the aspect of time

The aspect of time is important to consider when discussing the themes of race, ethnicity, discrimination and integration. As discussed, Jemubhai met a racist England when he arrived in 1939. There is no doubt he was discriminated against due to his skin colour and country of origin, a country under British control. Further, foreigners from Third World countries were not common in England in those days. When Chanu arrived in London in 1969, immigrants from earlier colonized countries had arrived in large number since around the middle of the fifties. England had an increasing need for workers, and for most immigrants this was their only chance to avoid hopelessness and poverty in their home countries. However, the issue of prejudice and discrimination is still relevant and important in this period, as it is today. How did the immigrants settle in their new society? What did the English think of them and how were they treated? Ali brings this atmosphere alive up until recently, and this will be in focus in the following paragraphs. Also Bijju arrives in America in our time. He meets a dynamic, multicultural society where immigrants have lived and worked for generations. Still, the theme of race-related matters are highly relevant, and the hierarchy where some races are superior to others still exists.

In contrast to Jemubhai, who both lives and studies in an English community, both Chanu and Bijju live in areas together with people who are in the same situation as themselves. Chanu, and later Nazneen, live in the middle of the Bangladeshi immigrant community in

London, and, apart from Chanu's work, they do not seem interested to know English people or English culture. In 1985, when Nazneen arrives, the Bangladeshi community in London begins to take form. Earlier on, in the late sixties and early seventies, few south Asians had been living in Britain for more than a decade (Gardner 7). Chanu seems to appreciate living in this closed Bangladeshi community. Here he recognizes both religious and cultural aspects. He is aware that there will always be uncertainty and risks involved approaching an unfamiliar society. Chanu's preference of living among people from his own country is strengthened by the fact that he does not show any interest in learning about the English society or to see different parts of London: "'I've spent more than half my life here', said Chanu, 'but I hardly left these few streets' ... 'All this time I have been struggling and struggling, and I barely had time to lift my head and look around'" (289). Ali emphasizes more than the geographical aspect by these comments. She indicates that Chanu has also failed to be open-minded and curious about his new country. However, one day, thirty years or so after he arrived in London, and when his girls are teenagers, he decides to take his family sightseeing. The day turns out to be a success for all of them; they find it both interesting and exciting to see the sights. Furthermore, the attractions make the tension in the family more relaxed, and it seems that they suddenly are able to see their lives in a larger perspective. This scene is important, because Ali tells the reader that any immigrant in London could obtain a much better life if they would allow themselves to approach the culture and the people of their new country. Further, Ali stresses the point that it is both possible and advantageous for immigrants to keep their own identity and stay loyal to their cultural background, and at the same time learn to know their new environment.

Likewise, Biju lives and works in a "closed" society of illegal immigrants in New York, with hardly any contact with the rest of society. However, in contrast to Chanu, Biju lives and works in a multicultural society, mostly represented by people from Third World countries. To a much larger extent than Chanu, Biju therefore has to relate to people with different nationalities, cultural backgrounds and religions. He often finds this difficult and frustrating. Like Chanu, Biju does not show any interest in learning about America or seeing the country while he is there. The main reason for this is, of course, that he needs to be "invisible" being an illegal immigrant, but also because his main concern is to survive through every day's work. On his way back to India, he reflects upon this: "Here he was, on his way home, without name or knowledge of the American president..." (286). This quote supports the point that Biju really is one of the "desperate" and that his only intention for coming is to make money.

The significance of individual personality

Based on the analysis of Jemubhai's character and life as a young man there are, however, still some important aspects to comment on regarding his personality. These issues are not taken up by Desai explicitly, but they are still relevant. Why does Jemubhai remain loyal to England throughout his life when it is clear to him that the English ruined him? Why does he, as an educated and intelligent man, "accept" this treatment in the passive way he does? And finally, why does he not later on use his power as a judge to take revenge on the British by helping other people from India who suffer in the same way? These are interesting and difficult questions, but the answers are traceable – partly in the judge's childhood and cultural background, but also in his personality. To be more specific, Jemubhai's personality is at an early stage influenced by the British power in India. He was born in 1919 in Piphit, a poor, rural village. His parents have to find their way in this challenging society, and his father owns a modest business procuring false witnesses to appear in court (57). Jemubhai's father is proud of his corrupt business and his training of the poor. When his only son is born, and it turns out that he is intelligent and clever, all resources are put into Jemubhai's education and future. One day at school, Jemubhai sees a portrait of Queen Victoria, and he feels "deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grew" (58). At the same time he sees the contrasts in society between the rich and successful English and the poor and dominated Indians. At an early stage, these observations make him prefer "English" to "Indian", a preference to which he remains loyal for the rest of his life. Well aware of his personal possibilities to succeed professionally, he faithfully chooses the side of power.

Jemubhai's fate in life is also due to certain personal features. It is considered common knowledge that people in difficult situations react differently. From his experiences of discrimination in England, the reader learns that his main reaction is isolation in order not to "offend them with brown skin" (204). This attitude suggests that Jemubhai has no pride for himself, his family or his Indian culture. He does not want to talk back or defend himself. Instead, he seems to accept his fate, and he reacts by passivity. His only aim is to study hard, for he knows that a return to India without his degree is impossible. In this way he seems selfish, but also pressured to fulfil his father's wish. One day when he is out walking in Cambridge he sees an Indian boy like himself brutally kicked, beaten, and mentally humiliated. However, Jemubhai does not try to help him, he does not even call for help (209). He is frightened and acts cowardly. Throughout life, the judge seems to do only what suits himself best and he continually chooses what contributes to improve his own situation. His

solitude therefore seems to promote his passivity. In a way he seems trapped in his own body and mind, without being able to escape. In this situation he appears as a victim of the colonial period.

However, back in India, as a highly educated man, Jemubhai has the chance to alter his situation. An alternative for his troubled mind could be to direct his hate and anger towards the British, who have hurt him so badly. He also has the power and the position to help other Indians to fight for their rights. But Jemubhai does not choose this alternative. Instead he uses his profession to promote British interests in India, even though India by now has gained its independence: “and again they would go to court with their unshakeable belief in the system of justice. Again they lost. Again they would lose. The man with the white curly wig and a dark face covered in powder, bringing down his hammer, always against the native, in a world that was still colonial” (205). This quote illustrates that the heritage from colonialism will last for many generations after independence and that the power of the white man will be prominent also in the future. This situation makes the judge greedy and selfish, but still a victim. Finally, the judge is also presented as a bit of a fool, wearing both a wig and powder.

It should be mentioned that the judge also has another side to his personality. In particular, this is visible in his relationship with Sai. Her presence is not easy to cope with; his nerves get upset and her company forces him to meet his unpleasant past. Trying to keep a distance towards her, he still tries to be as friendly as he can. When they meet for the first time, a fraction of their conversation is like this: “‘Your dog is like a film star’, said Sai. ‘Maybe an Audrey Hepburn’, said the judge, trying not to show how pleased he was at this remark” (33). This quote suggests that he tries to be friendly, and also that he has a sense of humour. The relationship between Sai and the judge develops, and they seem to respect each other. He decides to pay for her education like he did for her mother. For suddenly he understands that Sai “was more his kin than he had thought imaginable. There was something familiar about her; she had the same accent and manners. She was a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns, an estranged Indian living in India”, and further, “This granddaughter whom he didn’t hate was perhaps the only miracle fate had thrown his way” (210). These reflections show that the judge feels that they have several aspects in common, both the feeling of being strangers in their own country and familiarity with the English way of life. Realizing that his own emotional life is wounded, he still takes responsibility for Sai and her future. This side of the judge’s personality is important to mention, as it illustrates how his life could have turned out differently under other circumstances.

The passive way Jemubhai accepts his fate can also be traced in the character of Chanu in *Brick Lane*. Chanu feels that he is exposed to race discrimination, in particular he feels this is the reason why he does not obtain his planned promotion and thereby fails to succeed in England as he had hoped. The reader is never told the exact reasons for these circumstances, and the issue is therefore more open for interpretation than in the case of Jemubhai. In a conversation with her friend Razia, Nazneen tells her how Chanu feels about his situation: “My husband says they are racist, particularly Mr Dalloway. He thinks he will get the promotion, but it will take him longer than any white man. He says that if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem” (72). Razia reacts with the following questions: “Ask him this, then. Is it better than our own country, or is it worse? If it is worse, then why is he here? If it is better, why does he complain?” (72). As a response Nazneen replies: “I don’t know if he complains’, she found herself saying. ‘He just likes to talk about things. He says that racism is built into the “system”’” (72). This conversation confirms the feeling of uncertainty regarding discrimination in the case of Chanu. Is his skin colour and country of origin the reason why he does not meet his ambitions or is it due to individual features in his personality? Or is it just that he likes to talk about it? Chanu’s thoughts are further strengthened by what he calls the “immigrant tragedy”, which he brings up in several conversations throughout the novel. By this expression Chanu claims that an immigrant from the Third World has hardly any possibility to obtain a respectable and happy life in England. Because of the fact that many immigrants are uneducated, hardly any are able to advance professionally even though they work hard. Further, he claims that most immigrants “never left the village” in their hearts (140). As a contrast to this, Razia is grateful for being in a rich country where she and her children can live a decent life, where she as a widow can have a proper job and where schooling and health care service is free. She is well aware that this would not be the case if she lived in Bangladesh. She feels English, and she is proud to have obtained a British passport.

Another aspect with Chanu’s personality is the fact that he likes to see himself as an intellectual, and he is very proud of his courses and certificates. However, except from his degree from Dhaka University in English Literature, there is some uncertainty related to his formal education. The question is what kind of formal education he really has obtained and what he hopes to fulfil at the Open University in the future. Nevertheless, the important factor is that he feels that he has been neglected and that his degree from Dhaka University is not taken seriously. This situation naturally makes him depressed. There is also another aspect which is important to consider when discussing his failure to be promoted; there seems to be a

distance between his ideas and intentions and how he acts. Through Nazneen's eyes the reader learns that Chanu talks a lot, but that few of his plans are being realized: "He can see, thought Nazneen. He can comment. But he cannot act" (92). Thus, Chanu's personality might be both an additional and an alternative reason why he does not succeed as he had hoped for, as he does not seem to be able to influence his own situation. The reason might also be a combination of the two. However, like Jemubhai, Chanu seems to be a victim of the inheritance from the colonial period. Unlike Razia, however, Chanu never feels English - although he spends many years in England.

In contrast to Chanu, Biju is hardly in a position to question his difficult situation, as he lives in America on illegal terms. At first, he is loyal to the illegitimate system in which he is employed and he is forced to "accept" his humiliating conditions in practical terms. However, as time goes by, he gets more conscious about his own situation. Thus, even though it is challenging to get a job, Biju makes the decision to leave one of the restaurants in which he is working because they have meat on the menu. From then on he rejects any employment where meat is served (137). Quite some time after he arrives in New York, he starts working for an Indian restaurant. Biju seems happier now – no meat, no Pakistanis and no Bangladeshis (139). This emphasizes the importance of being able to stay loyal to one's own culture, religion and customs. Consequently, Biju finds a way to cope in his cross-cultural environment, without losing his pride for his Indian culture and religion. However, this example also shows that differences in religious and cultural beliefs are hard to deal with without prejudice and discrimination, also among people outside the country of origin. In some cases segregation seems to be the only alternative.

However, another scene from this restaurant gives a different picture of his now superficially "good" working conditions. One day Biju hurts his knee badly at work, and in great pain he asks his owner to send for a doctor. Biju also tells him that he holds him responsible, as the injury was caused by his slipping on some rotten spinach in the kitchen (187-189). Biju's relevant questions make the owner furious, and Biju's understands that his Indian boss, in spite of his friendliness at the surface, is just like any owner he has met - only interested in keeping the costs down through hiring illegal immigrants: "'Whitout us living like pigs' said Biju, 'what business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing because you know we can't do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal. Why don't you sponsor us for our green cards?'" (188). As a response to this his owner replies: "'Know how easily I can replace you? *Know how lucky you are!!!*'" (188). This incident makes Biju depressed; he feels trapped. He knows that a return to

India is almost impossible, as his father has asked him not to come back, but to stay in order to earn money to secure them both. However, in spite of this, from now on his thoughts keep circling around the question of returning. Similar to Chanu, he therefore decides to return to his home country in the end. He finds the humiliation he is exposed to and his working conditions unbearable, and will rather try to survive in India as best as he can.

As a vividly described contrast to the character of Jemubhai, Chanu and Biju, Deasai introduces the reader to Biju's friend in New York, Saeed Saeed from Zanzibar. Saeed Saeed is neither depressed nor invisible in spite of the fact that also he lives in America on illegal terms. He loves America and he always finds a solution to his problems. With his dreadlocks and sex appeal he dates girls from all nationalities and he continually applies for a green card. Once he is caught by the INS and deported back to Zanzibar, but soon he is back with a new name and a new passport (79). His character is important as to illustrate the significance of having a positive and optimistic view of life. Some people will always find a way, no matter how difficult a situation they are in. The character of Saeed Saeed is therefore important as to exemplify how the question of personality plays an important role. In many ways he can be compared to the character of Razia in *Brick Lane*, as they both appreciate their new countries. As regards to personal qualities, they also both seem to be "fighters". Saeed Saeed sums it up like this: "'Pay attention, man' he said with strict kindness. 'Now you are here, you are not back home. Anything you want, you try and you can do.'" (190).

Discrimination and the concept of stereotyping

The issues of stereotypical views are often linked to matters of race, discrimination and integration. Stereotype can be defined as: "A grossly oversimplified view of the characteristics of the members of a group (usually but not always derogatory), in which the characteristics thought to be prevalent in the group are attributed to each member, regardless of individual differences" (Sutherland 448). Based on this definition, Chanu deeply feels that he suffers from unjust stereotype thinking. Early in the novel he says that "to a white person, we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan" (28). This kind of thinking seems to be one of the most difficult to accept for Chanu: the fact that he, who has a University degree and a respectable job, should be categorized in the same group as other people from Bangladesh in London who are often illiterate, uneducated and close-minded peasants in his eyes (28). In particular, Chanu has little respect for people from Sylhet, and he is full of prejudice against them. Thus, Chanu's understanding of discrimination is complex.

As a parallel to the judge and the matter of internalization, Chanu feels rejected himself - but still he has prejudice against people from Sylhet.

Stereotyped views are also traceable in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Biju experiences it regularly, as the usual white employers see their employees as members of the huge group of “desperate” people from various Third World countries. In most cases they are not able to differentiate between their nationalities, their cultural background or their religion. They are really not interested as long as they do their job. Saeed Saeed also experiences stereotypical thinking, but this time in his own favour. Two months after he has been expelled from the USA he is back with a new name and a new passport. Unfortunately, he meets the same officer who deported him at JFK. He is nervous, but he is not recognized: “Thank God, to them we all of us look the same!” (79). Also in Kalimpong, stereotypical thinking is present. After the Nepalis have taken power, Lola reflects upon the situation of the poor, something she and her sister never had to do before. Now she realizes that the poor people “could name them, recognize them - the few rich - but Lola and Noni could barely distinguish between the individuals making up the crowd of poor” (241). Consequently, the matter of stereotyped views seem to exist among all nationalities or ethnic groups of people.

1.3 Concluding remarks

The themes of race and ethnicity are present in both *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*. Both Desai and Ali seem to be playing around with these issues through vivid descriptions of characters and plot. However, except from the illustration of the race discrimination which takes place in the case of Jemubhai, the two authors leave many aspects and questions regarding this theme open for interpretation. Through this technique they invite the reader to relate to the texts in an active way. Further, both Desai and Ali introduce other aspects which are essential to consider when the question of discrimination appears. External factors like aspects of time, place and terms of integration, and internal factors like personality and the tolerance for other people regardless of race and ethnicity, are of vital importance.

To a larger extent than Ali, Desai expands the term of race to also include the concept of ethnicity. Through the relationship between Sai and Gyan she emphasizes that discrimination due to ethnicity can be just as cruel and challenging to cope with as race discrimination. The extension of the term of race is important, as it suits the multicultural and dynamic world of today. In this regard the traditional comprehension of the tension between

East and West, in accordance with the theories of Said, seems to be somewhat insufficient. Due to the fact that *Orientalism* was written thirty years ago, Said's discourse seems to give a simplified picture of the situation. The world of today is to a large extent influenced by substantial immigration from Third World countries to the West and thereby the challenges of integration and tolerance are present. Thus, the tension is therefore not only between East and West, but also among ethnic groups within the same country or nation. Discrimination in this respect can take place both in the place of origin or in the "new" country. Both Ali and Desai stress the terrible consequences of discrimination based on race and ethnicity. Particularly, this is exemplified through the description of the character of Jemubhai. In this case Desai draws a picture of how extreme this act is – so cruel that the lives of the victims can be destroyed forever. The process of discrimination, internalization and projection seems almost impossible to break away from for the people who suffer.

Through the individual life stories of their characters, both Ali and Desai lift their discussion up to a universal level. Colonialism and the inheritance from the colonial period of Bangladesh and India respectively, are in focus in both novels. The concept of how the white imperial power of the West has influenced the prospects of former colonized countries is therefore important. Both authors emphasize how essential historical, geographical, cultural and religious aspects are, and how difficult and challenging the issues of tolerance, acceptance and integration can be. Further, they both seem to emphasize the importance of approaching new cultures without prejudice and stereotyped views, and to be open-minded and positive in general.

Throughout their novels Desai and Ali illustrate the significance of personality, and how individuals react differently in various situations. The human mind is complex, and individual characteristic features are a combination of genetics and the influence from the environment. In this chapter I have claimed that personality always plays an important role, also when the question of discrimination due to race or ethnicity is discussed. There will always be a question of how one reacts and "accepts" this intolerance. In particular, this has been visualised through the characters of Jemubhai, Biju and Chanu. The character of Saeed Saeed has been discussed to exemplify a rather opposite view of life. Thus, the question of personality will always be vital.

Chapter 2: The Theme of Gender

2.1 The Theme of Gender in *Brick Lane*

Introductory remarks

In accordance with my focus in this thesis I will now analyze and discuss how the theme of gender is presented in *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. In contrast to chapter 1, where the male characters of the two novels were in focus, this chapter will to a large extent concentrate on the female figures. The main reason for this choice is that the female characters in these two novels appear as strong individuals, who make the most of their possibilities. In spite of their various difficulties they manage to improve their lives. My main aim in this chapter will be to analyze and discuss if any of the females are discriminated against due to their sex, and to explore how they manage to develop into independent women. The fact that the main female characters live in different countries, England, Bangladesh and India respectively, makes the subject particularly interesting. How do the possibilities of living a respectable and independent life in these various countries depend on culture-specific gender roles? How important are the aspects of cultural and religious background, family relations, male dominance, finances, work, education and finally self-esteem to these women? In addition to these factors, the tension between the East and the West will be analyzed in relation to gender-related issues, both on the individual level of the characters and in a meta-perspective.

As discussed in the previous chapter on race, and with a link back to the pioneering work of Said, the prevailing imperialist view has been to associate western culture with power, imperialism, education and superiority while the East has been linked to a submissive, obedient and passive culture. In this chapter this relation will be drawn further and also analyzed in connection with the concept of gender. Traditionally, and also in accordance with the views of the colonial period, men are linked to the characteristics of the West, while women are associated with the typical features of the East. Several authors and literary critics have been interested in this relationship, but I will briefly exemplify these thoughts by referring to David Henry Hwang, as he is particularly clear and imaginative in this respect. In his play *M. Butterfly*, his character named Song says: ““The West thinks of itself as masculine—big guns, big industry, big money—so the East is feminine—weak, delicate, poor...but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom—the feminine mystique”” and further:

“You expect Oriental countries to submit to your guns, and you expect Oriental women to be submissive to your men. That’s why you say they make the best wives” (Hwang 83). Thus, in this chapter I will try to illustrate how the various characters fit into, and also challenge, this pattern.

Similar to the concepts of race and ethnicity, the understanding of the theme of gender is complex. It is therefore necessary to have a look at some definitions and central terms. In particular it is important to be aware of the difference between sex and gender. Whereas standard sociological textbooks traditionally have defined sex as the pre-social, biological body, gender has been seen as the cultural script that socializes the body and thereby produces women, men and, where applicable, additional genders, in a given sociocultural context (Puri 4). However, as Puri points out, it is important to notice that putative definitions of sex and gender have been challenged by feminist and queer theory over the last years (Puri 4). In her book *Woman, Native, Other* Trinh presents gender as Ivan Illich has done, as something which is “inherent in men’s and women’s acts, their speeches, gestures, grasps of reality, their spaces, patterns of living, and the objects in their surroundings; it reigns in non-industrialized societies as a regulative force that renders inevitable the collective, mutual dependence of men and women, setting thereby limits to dominion, exploitation, and defeat” (Trinh 107). These definitions will be helpful for the following discussion, in particular the one presented by Trinh will be central and suitable for the two novels in question.

As to my method, *Brick Lane* will serve as my foundational text in this chapter, as this novel gives a rich and detailed picture of many strong, female characters who struggle for their lives and dignity. In particular, the characters of Nazneen and Hasina will be my focus. When Nazneen moves to London their only contact is through letters, and this is how the reader is introduced to Hasina. Through this technique, Ali tells two parallel stories. In the main story about Nazneen, the reader is introduced to how it is for a young woman from the Third World to be an immigrant in London. The other story describes the challenges a woman in Bangladesh must overcome in order to survive. Ali’s message of putting these two gendered narratives up against each other is to emphasize the contrasts which exist between the East and the West regarding women’s living conditions and possibilities to live an independent life. Consequently, two totally different settings are described. The male characters of both novels will be considered when important points are illuminated or seen in relation to the female figures.

Nazneen and Hasina and their cultural and religious background

In her novel *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali writes: “Just wait and see, that’s all we can do. How often she had heard those words. Amma always wiped away her tears with those words” (46). In an interview with *Book Wire* in June 2004, Ali is asked about Nazneen’s relationship to the issue of accepting fate and life as it comes. Ali answers: “Nazneen’s central dilemma is this question of what she can control in her life, and when it is better to accept things. For her it is social, cultural, religious and part of her family background. But we all deal with that same issue. It is a fundamental human question” (Sakaria “Meet the author”). Nazneen’s voice in the first quote is important, as it illustrates her and her sister’s religious and cultural background. Being brought up in East Pakistan in the late sixties, their lives are at an early stage influenced by Islam and the belief in predetermination. The concept of predetermination has traditionally been strong in Islam; however, the importance of the matter varies depending on which key tradition one belongs to. According to the early tradition of Jabris, predetermination is of vital importance, and it reflects the idea that human beings do not have control over their actions, as they are all predetermined by God (Saeed 8). This is an interesting contrast to the early Muslim tradition of Qadaris, who challenged the Jabris tradition. The Qadaris believed that God does not pre-ordain what people do, but that human beings are free and can choose between right and wrong (Saeed 8). However, independent of religious tradition and like in any other religion, there is always a question of interpretation. The understanding of the difference between predetermination or fate and free will is of vital importance for the lives and development of Nazneen and Hasina. For example: Has the course of their lives already been decided? Is there a point in making decisions out of free will influencing their own lives? Their questions are many, but gradually they learn how to cope and live with these difficult questions. Returning to Ali’s answer in the interview, it is also of significance that she claims that “we all deal with that same issue” and that these reflections are fundamental human questions. In this connection it will be interesting to see how the issue of gender links up with these questions, and see if the attitudes towards predetermination and free will are different depending on gender identity.

Islam and the total belief in predetermination are very important for Rupban, the mother of Nazneen and Hasina. However, this view on life does not work out very well for her: one day, probably for the first time in her life, she acts based on her own decision and takes her own life. The significance of her death is of great importance for Nazneen and Hasina, who are brought up without a mother. However, the most important matter in this connection is the question *why* – what makes a mother responsible for two young girls take

her own life – an act which is also strictly forbidden in her religion? Also in a gender perspective the suicide is important – is suicide in any way related to gender? The reader is not told the exact reason for Rupban's decision to take her own life, but it is pointed out that she feels both depressed and trapped. It is also indicated that her husband sees other women. Hence, the suicide seems to be the only way to escape a hopeless situation of male dominance. She feels she is not able to control her own life, and like many other women in her situation she sees death as the only solution. If she had been a man she could have left, but as a woman this alternative is not an option. The fact that suicide is forbidden in Islam emphasizes how depressed she is. There is an attempt to keep the suicide a secret from the two girls, but Hasina understood what happened when she was twelve. Thus, the truth about their mother's death is revealed to the sisters at different stages in life, Nazneen is thirty-four when the secret is revealed to her in a letter from her sister. Naturally, this truth influences the two sisters differently.

Nazneen and gender issues

The reader's first meeting with Nazneen takes place when her mother gives birth to her. The scene is vividly described but also dramatic, as the midwife, soon after the birth, declares that the baby is dead. However, a little cry from the newborn baby tells the three women present that there is hope for the baby's survival, although she is very weak. Rupban is suddenly left to the difficult dilemma: should she send her weak baby to the hospital for medical attention or should she, as the midwife suggests, "...just see what Fate will do"? (14). In spite of her sister-in-law's wish, Rupban declares: "'No', she said, 'we must not stand in the way of Fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger'" (14). This scene becomes very important for Nazneen and her view on life. First of all, this passage exemplifies Nazneen's social and cultural background, and the strong heritage from her mother: the absolute belief in fate. Her mother strongly believes that God, ahead of time, has determined what will happen to her weak child. In Rupban's world there is no room for the concept of free will, and this is the most important reason why she does not want to bring her daughter to the hospital. This acceptance of everything that happens naturally makes her a very passive person - she never deliberately makes decisions which can change or influence her own or her daughters' lives.

For Rupban this passivity and attitude towards life is closely linked to the concept of both gender and religion. She feels submissive in two ways, both in her relation to God and in her relationship with men. Rupban's fatalistic view of life is passed on to Nazneen, and for an

extensive part of Nazneen's life this principle becomes very important to her: "What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle and challenge" (16).

Influenced by her mother's fatalistic view of life, Nazneen grows up as an obedient child, not challenging fate or what is meant for her. When she turns eighteen, her father arranges a marriage between her and Chanu, a Bangladeshi man who has lived in London for several years. Due to her cultural and religious upbringing, Nazneen is obedient to her father's wish, and, as she has learnt to, she passively accepts the choice of husband he makes for her: "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma" (16). Nazneen's first months in Brick Lane in London, in the middle of the Bangladeshi immigrant community, is a challenge for her both due to her race and gender. Naturally, her new situation is a cultural shock to her: the weather, the flat, the language and the new systems are all very unfamiliar. However, her most challenging task seems to be getting used to her husband. Due to Nazneen's feeling of uncertainty in her new environment in addition to her cultural and religious background, Chanu takes the position as the head of the family and he makes all the necessary decisions - also on her behalf. Nazneen seems both lonely and depressed in this period. She feels lonely on two different psychological levels - both as an immigrant in a foreign country and in her relationship to Chanu, with whom she feels she has nothing in common: "What she missed most was people", and further on: "In all her eighteen years, she could scarcely remember a moment that she had spent alone. Until she married. And came to London to sit day after day in this large box with the furniture to dust" (24).

At this stage, their marriage is only a practical arrangement; there are no signs of "falling in love". Chanu, who has married late in life, mostly seems to appreciate her qualities as a good worker - that she cleans and cooks well, and that she cuts his corns and nose hair. He also seems pleased that she is "an unspoilt girl from the village" (22). In this way Nazneen fulfils the role as the traditional good housewife. Although she is disappointed regarding her marriage, she also accepts this part of her life: "What had she imagined? That he was in love with her? ... Yes. Yes. She realized in a stingy rush she had imagined all these things. Such a foolish girl. Such high notions. What self-regard" (23).

Nazneen's cultural and religious background are important as to how she reflects upon her life in this period. She seems to accept her unhappy life and what God has decided for her. She lives by the rules she has been taught by her mother; what happens in life is predetermined, there is nothing she can or should do in order to challenge fate. Her situation

naturally makes her passive, but also rather indifferent. Why bother to try to change anything? The best way to handle life is just to “wait and see”. However, as a reflective young girl, Nazneen is able to see how her new life can be improved, but she does not fight for it. When she asks Chanu if she can leave the flat, he replies: “‘Why should you go out?’” (45). Nazneen, “never said anything to this” (45). She also tells Chanu that she would like to learn English, but Chanu only says: “‘It will come. Don’t worry about it. Where’s the need anyway?’” (37). These examples illustrate that Chanu is the dominant part in their relationship, and that he uses his power to make decisions on behalf of them both. However, it is important to be aware that Chanu’s superiority is part of *his* cultural background. To him, these were his expectations when he decided to get married. Nazneen seems to accept all this. And she does not expect much either from her married life or from life in general. In this situation Nazneen is passive, partly because of her cultural background and her upbringing, but also because of her gender.

“Chanu had not beaten her yet. He showed no signs of wanting to beat her. In fact he was kind and gentle” (22). This quote gives the reader important information both about Nazneen and Chanu. First of all, it suggests that Nazneen is used to the idea that husbands beat their wives. The fact that men use their physical strength to dominate women seems to happen frequently in her cultural setting and she seems to expect this kind of physical abuse to happen. However, even though Chanu never hurts Nazneen physically, there is no doubt that he wants to keep a leading position in everyday life. In the first part of their marriage it is easy for him to maintain his dominance, as Nazneen is surrounded by external factors which limit her possibilities. Her unfamiliarity with her new environment, her position as an immigrant woman from the Third World, the unfamiliar language and Chanu’s wish that she should not “go out” are some of the elements which prevent her from developing socially and getting to know her new country. Her passivity influenced by her cultural background makes Nazneen feel both trapped and submissive in her relationship with Chanu: “...she saw that she was trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity” (76). In spite of this, the reader understands that she really is longing to take part in her new London society and that she is curious about her new culture. Thus, from this period in her life, her possibilities are limited both due to her gender and her race.

There are several main events in Nazneen’s life which are of major importance for her personal development in searching for her identity. Very gradually she starts to break away from the thought of predestination which has influenced most of her life and to take steps towards an independent life, making her own decisions. The first episode is the death of their

son Raquib, who dies unexpectedly only a few years old. Naturally, this is a terrible shock and sorrow to both her and Chanu. However, there is still another reason why Nazneen hardly believes the sad outcome, and that is the fact that she for the week they have spent in hospital has "...willed him to live" (122). Actually, after some days in hospital Raquib becomes better, and everybody seems to believe that he will survive. Nazneen feels certain that it is her will that has made him better: "She willed him to live and he did. In the quiet she realized many things, most of all that she was immensely, inexplicably, happy" (122). Nazneen's strong will is in this scene an important part of her process of questioning her cultural background. However, it is also closely linked with her belief in God: "Although, of course, ...only God decided" (135). Unlike her own mother when Nazneen was born, she and Chanu do everything to try to save Raquib's life (136). Thinking about this, Nazneen is suddenly enraged and blames her mother, Rupban, for being passive in a similar situation - leaving the matter of life and death to God alone (136). In a gender perspective it is interesting to question if Rupban would have reacted differently if Nazneen had been a boy? On the one hand, Rupban's strong belief in God's will and predestination is superior to other circumstances. However, when she later decides to kill herself, she shows that she is able to put her religion aside. It is also important to note that Nazneen's mother makes the decision about her child's destiny alone – would this have been different if Nazneen had been a boy? If the father was to be consulted, the gender of the child might have been important. When Nazneen's father comes to look at Nazneen and Rupban tells him that it is a girl, he exclaims: "'I know. Never mind,' said Hamid. 'What can you do?' And he went away again'" (14). Thus, in this scene Nazneen starts questioning the passive belief in predestination, and she starts realizing that action (in this case bringing Raquib to hospital) can be necessary to influence a state or situation. She feels she has fought for him, done everything possible, and for a few days she is extremely happy. She also feels that this is something she has done herself. Even though Raquib dies, the joy she feels during these few days is so strong that it stimulates her to challenge her cultural background in the future. This is probably the first time in her life that she acts out of her own free will and that she understands that action can be vital.

Thirteen years later, when Nazneen and Chanu are parents of two girls, Chanu decides that they are going back to Dhaka. He is depressed by his broken dreams regarding a prosperous life, and he has been unemployed for some time. However, in order to be able to finance the trip and to buy a place in Dhaka, they need money. He therefore finally allows Nazneen to make money from sewing, as she has been asking, and he buys her a sewing

machine (191-192). The sewing machine and the money she makes mean a lot to Nazneen. First of all, the work makes it possible for her to secretly send money to Hasina, who now is in a very difficult situation. Even though Nazneen, during the first two months, does not know how much money she makes due to Chanu's wish "to take care of everything" (208), she feels independent. Thus, in this case, her desire to help her sister is stronger than her obedience to her husband. Furthermore, the sewing machine can be seen as a symbol of freedom and independence. As to the question of gender, it is also interesting to note that sewing is a typical female occupation. This passage illustrates how Nazneen makes a step towards an independent life, trying to break away from her passivity and her subordinate position in her relationship with Chanu. For a short period, Nazneen's and Chanu's roles are switched. This knowledge makes her stronger.

Due to her sewing occupation, Nazneen gradually gets to know Karim, her middleman. He is a young, second-generation immigrant from Bangladesh. He frequently comes to the flat to collect or give her more sewing work. After a while, their relationship develops, and they become romantically involved. Nazneen is well aware that the price for this relationship might be death, and that she can be stoned as an outcome. Still, she keeps Karim as a lover. In this experience she is strong and confident, and she seems to be the one with the most initiative. Thus, for the first time in her life she becomes the dominant part in a relationship with a man. In this respect she is challenging her cultural background, her religion and her marriage. She seems to feel that if God already has determined that their relationship should take place, there is nothing she can do about it. And, if their relationship is not a part of God's plan, she is still willing to take the chance. Her decision illustrates that she now wants to make her own choices and that she is able to enjoy life. However, Karim is not only important to Nazneen because of their love affair. He is also the person who teaches her about important political and religious issues in the world. And Nazneen is eager to learn: "He began to talk to her about the world. She encouraged him" (243). But his knowledge also makes Nazneen aware of her own lack of education and knowledge. One day she attends a political meeting with him. She is stronger now, and she is more willing to act out of her own free will. At the meeting there is an election for chairman, and Karim is one of the candidates. The election is close, and Karim wins by one vote. Nazneen is amazed by her newly gained power: "I have given him victory, thought Nazneen. By raising her hand, or not raising it, she could alter the course of events" (242). This scene is important to Nazneen, as she realizes that she is able to influence important decisions in society. Karim therefore becomes a very important factor in her life; he makes her see herself in a new way.

However, her relationship with Karim also makes life difficult for Nazneen. She always feels guilty thinking about him and she is terrified by the consequences of their illicit affair. There is also the life of Chanu and her two young daughters to consider. The situation becomes more and more difficult for her, and for a period she becomes rather indifferent to herself and her situation. However, at the same time she seems more relaxed and calm. She is not the submissive, passive wife any longer, and she has gained the strength to take control of her own life. She is now also able to see how her life has been over the years in Brick Lane, and how she could have done things differently if she had been more active - "But she had left everything undone" (342). Feeling certain that Chanu is serious about his decision to leave England, Nazneen has to make a severe decision: Should she and their two daughters go with him? In contrast to Chanu, Nazneen has a realistic picture of what a return to Bangladesh will be like: "Dhaka would be a disaster. Shahana would never forgive her. Chanu would be finished. It was not even going home. She had never been there" (426). During this period of contemplation, one thing becomes very clear to Nazneen; she wants to make the decisions herself: "Suddenly her entire being lit up with anger. *I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one*" (405). This illustrates that Nazneen has now become a strong and independent woman who dares to trust her own abilities. For the first time she feels free to choose what is best for her and her daughters. There is no father figure, husband or other dominant person who should tell her what to do. Her decision to stay in England changes her relationship to Chanu - now she is the powerful part. Influenced by the West and experiencing the possibilities women in England have to live an independent life, Nazneen is also prepared to challenge the concept of predetermination and religion. Furthermore, she feels that her free will is included in God's plan, and that predestination does not have to be a contradiction to this. Consequently, Nazneen believes that God accepts that the concepts of predetermination and free will are linked, and work together.

Hasina and gender issues

The two sisters grow up with a different view on life. Whereas Nazneen is an obedient and passive child, Hasina at an early stage chooses a different path: Hasina "listened to no one" (16). Criticizing her mother for her passive life, not trying to make any decisions of her own in order to improve her situation, Hasina chooses to live her life differently. Her philosophy is that she is not on earth to suffer and she remains loyal to this throughout the narrative. As a young girl she therefore runs off and marries a young man out of love and her own free will, without permission from her father. When she later leaves her violent husband

and moves to Dhaka, she is all alone and is forced to create her own life and make her own decisions. Hasina's fate in life is that she is too beautiful - at the age of sixteen "her beauty was becoming almost unbearable to own or even to look at" (16). To a large extent, her beauty causes her problems: untrue lies and rumours are said out about her and she is continually taken advantage of by men. Naturally, Nazneen is very concerned about her sister:

It worried her that Hasina kicked against fate. No good could come of it. Not a single person could say so. But then if you really looked into it, thought about it more deeply, how could you be sure that Hasina was not simply following her fate? If fate cannot be changed, no matter how you struggle against it, then perhaps Hasina was fated to run away with Malek. Maybe she struggled against *that*, and *that* was what she could not alter. (22)

In this quote, Ali in her own words explains what fate and predestination are. Hasina, as a very young girl, makes one choice out of her free will, which later makes her life very difficult. This choice leads to several consequences, which again leads to new choices and consequences. But, if everything is predetermined by God – how can Hasina then choose differently? No matter how hard Hasina struggles against this, her fate cannot be changed. Thus, by this Ali wants to exemplify how difficult life becomes for those who lean far toward predetermination.

"Here come the garment girls. Choose the one you like" (152). Hasina's attempt to create a new life in Dhaka independent of a man is certainly a challenge for her and the other women in the factory. Not only because of the hard work, but due to prejudice against female workers and stereotypical views. The quote above suggests that the female workers act in a lewd manner and that there is a close link between gender and religion in this respect. This connection is further emphasized by the fact that a mullah organises the protests which start outside the factory: "Day and night they playing religious message with loudspeaker. They say it sinful for men and women working together" (152). Naturally, Hasina and her female colleagues feel insulted by this, and as Hasina points out, it is not even true as men and women are kept in separate rooms. Through the lives of Aleya, Shahnaz, Renu and Hasina, the reader is introduced to women who need to or want to earn their own money, and how they have to struggle both culturally and professionally to keep their jobs. Aleya, who has five children, needs the money so that she can send her boys to school. Her husband does not want her to work outside the home: "Why should you work? If you work it looks bad. People will say - he cannot feed her" (150). These are almost the exact same words as Chanu used when Nazneen asked for permission to go out: "If you go out, ten people will say, 'I saw her walking on the street'. And I will look like a fool" (45). These quotes are important as they

illustrate what Chanu calls “village attitudes” (459) and they describe aspects of Bangladeshi men and *their* culture. They also confirm what men in this culture are afraid of: “The woman gets some money, she starts feeling she is as good as the man and she can do as she likes” (459). However, finally Aleya’s husband accepts and he buys her a burkha (150). When the demonstrations against “the garment girls” start, Aleya’s husband panics, and she has to wear the burkha inside the factory as well. Later on, when Aleya gets a new sari as a bonus for being the best worker in the factory, her husband is not able to control himself. He seriously injures her by beating. Through these examples Ali wants to exemplify the relationship between gender issues and aspects of religion and culture. It will therefore be necessary to have a closer look at Islam and to see whether there is a relation between this religion and womanhood, and, if this connection exists, to explore if it is of a discriminating character.

In her book *Islams Hus*, Kari Vogt states that the concept of family is the foundation in Islam. She also states that in many Islamic cultures, women have traditionally taken care of the home and the upbringing of children (Vogt 237). As the interpretation and practice of Islam varies in different cultures and societies, I will have to base my discussion on the general knowledge and interpretation of Vogt. Vogt further says that the Koran has two general statements regarding the status of women. The first confirms the principle of subordination, like in sura 4,38: “Men are women’s guardians”, or like in sura 2,228: “...men have an advantage compared to them” (Vogt 141). At this stage it is important to be aware that in any religion, there is always a question of interpretation of foundational sources. This is also the case of Islam, and the practice of this religion has varied in different cultures and societies throughout history. Abdullah Saeed confirms that family law represents the major area of Islam which has not been reformed in response to external trends and the needs of today (57). He further claims that as family law is derived from Islamic sources in many Muslim societies, there is often a “contradiction between a woman’s constitutional right to work and a family law that enables her husband to require that she obtains his permission to work outside the home” (Saeed 57). Muslim feminism has been concerned with these controversies and argued that it is important to reread the Koran because the male oriented readings of early and modern scholars are biased against women (Saeed 31). These general ideas will serve as a foundation for the following discussion.

The different arguments mentioned make it easier to understand what is really happening when the trouble starts outside the factory where Hasina works. Based on religion and traditions, the husbands feel they have the right to make decisions on behalf of their wives. Even though their motives for controlling their wives vary, they want to maintain the

power they automatically obtain when they get married. This illustrates that there exists a link between gender and Islam, in this case a connection to the traditions of patriarchal societies. In some cases the men, for example the husband of Aleya, even feel that physical abuse is justified in order to maintain their authority. Another way to look at this issue is to recognize this male behaviour as deliberately using religion as a means of hiding other inner emotional feelings of, for example, jealousy or the feeling of losing power and control. Thus, through the picture Ali gives of the “garment girls”, the reader can see how religion and gender intersect and how religion can be used as a means of proving power and masculinity.

In addition to their difficulties regarding being allowed to work, the women at the factory are also discriminated against professionally. The women do not seem to have the same conditions as their male colleagues: “No men doing machining. Men they cannot sit quiet so long. They have to fidget and talk and walk around smoking. They make pattern and cut cloth these are difficult job. Also they iron. That job too dangerous for woman we do not understand the electricity” (152). From Ali’s descriptions it is quite clear that the women do not have the same freedom as their male colleagues. Regarding their pay, the reader is not given any detailed information, but it is repeated several times that Hasina is not able to pay her rent. From this, the reader can assume that the women are not paid well for the work they are doing. The quote also confirms the low self-esteem of these women. Most of them feel oppressed in many areas of life and they therefore feel that the men automatically are better qualified to do certain tasks. They are not given the chance to prove their abilities. Still, Hasina and her female colleagues are both proud and grateful for their work: “My machine so new and beautiful I hardly daring to touch...” (150). They are also aware that if they complain about anything they will get “the sack” (161). Thus, the “garment girls” have no rights and what they say or think is not worth anything.

At the factory Hasina meets Abdul, who on the surface seems to be kind and friendly. They soon become friends, and Abdul says he is in love with her. However, one day at work he betrays her by telling the manager untrue stories about her lewd manners. Hasina immediately loses her job. Her question of *why* is absolutely worthless. The manager has already made up his mind, and she is not allowed to stand up for herself and explain her version. Outside the door, Hasina can hear the manager joking about her beauty and teasing Abdul about needing some practise before marriage (162). This scene is very humiliating for Hasina, and it shows how she is discriminated against due to her sex. In many ways this event also represents a turning point in Hasina’s life, both mentally and in practical terms. From now on, it becomes very difficult for her to live a respectable life, and her feelings are

seriously hurt. Her noble but naïve philosophy “Pure is in the mind. Keep yourself pure in mind and God will protect” (153), does not give the same comfort any longer. However, it is important to note that both Hasina and Nazneen faithfully stick to their religion throughout their experiences and difficulties. For them, Islam means comfort and provides good rules for living. *Their* God is only kind, understanding and well meaning and prayers become dear and soothing for them. Hence, Ali characterizes Islam as ambivalent. On one hand Islam represents strength and beauty, on the other hand it characterizes something negative, a means to promote oppression. Ali seems unable to decide what course to follow in this novel. Also professionally Hasina and her female colleagues have to accept what men decide for them. They have no power to influence or improve their situation. They are used to being oppressed and dominated by men, and they are trapped in this male dominated community. Accordingly, Hasina and the other women at the factory also face discrimination at work, and in this respect it is apparent that the oppression they are exposed to is closely linked to traditions and the way Islam can be practised.

Men play an important role in Hasina’s life, and in most cases they seem to harm, oppress and take advantage of her. Having eloped with Malek, she is really on her own, she knows that it will be impossible to turn to her father again. That is why the correspondence with Nazneen means so much to her. This situation, together with being in love with Malek, Hasina makes every effort to please her husband in any way. In this regard she fills the traditional role as a good wife. However, already in Hasina’s first letter to Nazneen she indicates that her marriage is not just happy: “Everything good between us now. I do not let my tongue make trouble for it as my husband say. Just because man is kind to wife it do not mean she can say what she like” (25). This illustrates that Malek wants to control Hasina, both her speech and her behaviour. A combination of Hasina’s cultural upbringing and her naïve and positive attitude to life, makes Hasina accept his terms, she even justifies them: “I maybe not good wife but is how I try for always...He is a very good man and very patient. Sometime I make him lose patience without I mean to” (47). When Malek’s feeling of power develops and he starts beating her, Hasina decides to leave him and go to Dhaka. Again, she makes a decision out of her own free will, although she is warned by her landlady: “...better get beaten by own husband than beating by stranger” (58). This exemplifies the patriarchal environment in which she is living, and it proves how oppressed the women are.

Mr Chowdhury, Hasina’s new landlord after she has left Malek, is also of considerable significance in Hasina’s life. Seeing her as a young, beautiful woman in a weak position he offers to rent a room to her in his building in Marayangarj. From the very beginning it is quite

clear that his intention is to establish a close relationship with her: “Sister can Mr Chowdhury mean to take for wife?” (163). He is much older than her, his wife has been dead for many years and his sons have left. However, Mr Chowdhury’s character is complex, and in the beginning his intentions are hidden by a “father-daughter” relationship. He tells her that he will protect her like a father, he actually wants her to call him “father”, and that she is like a daughter for him. Gradually, he makes her feel dependent on him. This develops further, and he accepts that Hasina lives in his flat only able to pay part of the rent. Hasina, who also in this relationship seems naïve and grateful, is eager to fulfil his needs: she combs his hair and massages his feet. However, she always feels that she is in debt to him because he is “rich and powerful” (163). Automatically, Mr Chowdhury becomes the powerful part in their relationship. When he later hears the rumours about Hasina at the factory he loses control, rapes her and degrades her in every way. He is not willing to listen to her explanations and he never questions the truth of what he has heard. In this situation he is not thinking about her and the difficult situation she is in, but only about himself and how this will influence his own life: “What you have done to me? ...Did they put roof over your head? Did they treat like daughter? What did they give you? What did I get?” (165).

At this stage it is interesting to draw a parallel to Nazneen’s relationship with Karim, as both sisters have extra-marital affairs. In contrast to Hasina, Nazneen feels strong and confident in her relationship. Often, she is the one with most initiative and she knows that Karim appreciates this. He accepts her as she is. Furthermore, they consider themselves as equals in their illicit affair – independent of their gender. Hence, the extra-marital relationships of the two sisters prove to be very different. This situation also reflects the difference in culture of Bangladesh and England, both regarding religion, sexuality and traditions. In this respect it is important to remember that Karim is a second generation immigrant in England and that he has been brought up in accordance with both Western and Bangladeshi norms. Hasina, on the other hand, feels both submissive and depressed in her relationship with Mr Chowdhury and she feels that God has cursed her life (166). Again, she feels it impossible to live a respectful life in relationship with a man. She feels humiliated, powerless and unfairly treated. Again, she feels that it is her own fault: “Everything has happen is because of me. I take my own husband. I leave him. I go to the factory. I let Abdul walk with me” (166). Thus, both Abdul and Mr. Chowdhury make life so difficult for her by promoting their own interests, and finally Hasina has to work as a prostitute in order to survive.

Due to her profession as a prostitute, Hasina meets a lot of men. However, some men in Hasina's life also prove to be kind and well-meaning. Both Hussain and Zaid are kind to her and accept her as she is. Hussain looks out for Hasina when she works as a prostitute and makes sure she gets her money. Even though Hussain is involved in her profession, he also becomes a good friend to her. He gives her presents, he is kind, and he makes her laugh (168). When a customer, Ahmed, wants to marry Hasina, Hussain is thinking of what is best for her, without taking his own needs into consideration. Being aware that he will die soon, he wants someone else to take care of her: "Who will protect you if not him? I let you go. This life is finish. Begin another" (171). Also Zaid, the cook in the household of James and Lovely, treats Hasina with respect. Zaid has an optimistic view on life, feeling sure "his time is coming" (224). He always seems to be in a good mood, and he tries to improve Hasina's self-esteem through humour and his kung fu abilities. Their relationship develops, and finally Hasina is ready to take another step towards freedom – she runs away with him. This decision shows that Hasina, in spite of her former experiences and difficulties, still believes in free will rather than predetermination. Hence, Hasina is pictured as a strong woman who trusts her own judgement. When Chanu sees Hasina in Dhaka, he tells Nazneen that she looks "unbroken" (488). When Chanu later asks Nazneen why she thinks Hasina has eloped once more, Nazneen replies: "'Because', she said, 'she isn't going to give up'" (490).

2.2 A comparison of the Theme of Gender in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*

Introductory remarks

The main focus in this comparison will be between Nimi from *The Inheritance of Loss* and Hasina from *Brick Lane*, who represent discriminated young women from the Third World. In order to emphasize their difficult situation, the theories of Spivak will be drawn into the discussion. In accordance with Spivak's thoughts, it is interesting to note that Nimi and Hasina are only presented as minor figures in the novels, just like they are minors or "subalterns" in their life situations. Hasina is only presented through letters and Nimi is mostly seen in relation to Jemubhai – her fate is described in a few pages. Both Ali and Desai are interested in discussing gender-related themes in their novels. However, it seems that Ali focuses somewhat more on the subject than Desai, as she includes more female characters, including rich details about the experiences and destinies of these figures. Desai, on the other hand, seems more interested in depicting themes of colonialism, race and ethnicity.

Nimi and Hasina, two women from the Third World

Hasina's experiences and thoughts make a natural comparison to the character of Nimi in *The Inheritance of Loss*, who is also a subaltern woman discriminated against due to her sex. Although these two women are from different countries with different cultural and religious backgrounds, there are still several aspects which make them interesting to compare. Like Hasina, Nimi is seriously oppressed by her husband. Jemubhai's systematic abuse of her starts as soon as he is back from England. Until she dies, Nimi is controlled by men - first by her father then by her husband. From childhood until she starts her married life with Jemubhai, Nimi is "carefully locked up" (89) together with her mother and sisters in order to improve her father's honour in the community and to be kept at a solid distance from her father's business of supplying women to soldiers (89). Nimi and her sisters live a life of boredom; they are hardly ever allowed to leave the house and to explore the world around them. They are obediently obeying their father's authority and they are just waiting to get married. Thus, Nimi feels trapped in her father's house, not being able to influence her own life.

In her married life with Jemubhai this solitude continues, and he makes all the decisions. For most of the time she is left alone at their house in Bonda (171). However, even though Jemubhai leaves her alone for long periods, she is not able to enjoy any kind of freedom. Due to his mental oppression and physical abuse of her, Nimi becomes very depressed and indifferent to her own situation. In addition, she is so used to being "locked up" that the thought of leaving him never really occurs to her: "...she was still unable to contemplate the idea of walking through the gate. The way it stood open for her to come and go-the sight filled her with loneliness. She was uncared for, her freedom useless..." (171). Thus, Nimi is never able to recover from the humiliation and violence she suffers in her marriage. Like Hasina, she feels trapped in a world dominated by men. In this respect, Hasina and Nimi fit into the theories of Said and Hwang; they are both filling the roles of the passive, poor and subordinate woman from the Third World, characteristics traditionally associated with the East. This reflects a deep contrast to the typical features of the West which are related to power, masculinity, independence and development.

However, there is one important difference between Hasina and Nimi. Hasina challenges her own situation again and again by making her own decisions. Even though her decisions often make life very difficult for her, she still has the courage to leave an undignified situation and to move on with her life. Her optimistic and positive attitude helps her along, and once again, the importance of individual personality is illustrated. Nimi, on the

other hand, is not able to fight back or to leave her husband. Instead, her reactions to his abuse are silence and the refusal to cooperate when he wants to westernize her identity. However, Nimi's view of him as a cruel man is maintained until the end of their relationship, and finally she gets the courage to talk back: "*You are the one who is stupid*" (304). After this incident Jemubhai sees no other option than returning her to her family, as he fears he will kill her if she stays on. This situation is impossible to bear for Nimi, the thought of her family's shame on her behalf being too much to bear (305). Thus again, she is confronted with an impossible situation, but due to the discrimination against her she is not able to influence the decision which has been made. Nimi ends her life in the house of a brother-in-law where she "accidentally" catches fire over a stove. Like many other women in India she is killed "without a witness, without a case" (307), in a country "where human life was cheap, where standards were shoddy, where stoves were badly made and cheap saris caught fire as easily-" (307). Hence, through the story of Nimi, Desai draws a realistic picture of how many women in the Third World suffer.

Based on the above, it is tempting to draw attention to the "silence" of Nimi, Hasina, Aleya, Monju and all the other troubled women of the Third World. They are not able to voice or express their difficult situation to the world around them. In her essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?* Spivak discusses exactly these problem issues. In an interview with Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean in 1993, Spivak elaborates on her theories:

Problems arises if you take this "speak" absolutely literally as "talk" ...The actual fact of giving utterance is not what I was concerned about. What I was concerned about was that even when one uttered, one was constructed by a certain kind of psychobiography, so that the utterance itself - this is another side of the argument - would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything. (Landry and MacLean 291)

Further, Spivak explains that by speaking she means "...a transaction between the speaker and the listener" (Landry and MacLean 289). These quotes are important in the case of Nimi and Hasina. First of all, Spivak states that there needs to be a two-way communication, a messenger and a receiver, in order to get a message through. Secondly, the quote suggests that utterances in general are traditionally interpreted, and consequently of a patriarchal nature. Both these issues are problematic for Nimi and Hasina. In their oppressed situations they are not able to communicate their fear and hopelessness to the world around them, as the listeners are either "silenced" themselves or influenced by the same patriarchal culture or customs. The existing male language is therefore not able to receive a true picture of their situation, and is thereby not a suitable means to promote the utterances of subaltern women. According to

Spivak, not even women from the First World are able to understand the situation of poor, suppressed women from the Third World. The significance of this is that women like Nimi and Hasina can never obtain any kind of freedom or power - they are “silenced” for the world around. Thus, through their novels Ali and Desai attempt to give voice to these subaltern women and to draw attention to their lives and difficult situations.

The theme of gender in a historical perspective and in connection to imperialism

It is interesting to note that in several letters to Nazneen, Hasina tells her that she goes up on the roof (25, 58, 173, 174). In the first letter Hasina mentions this, she is in the beginning of her marriage, and Nazneen has just moved to London with Chanu (25). The second time, she has just left her husband and moved to Dhaka (58). A plausible interpretation of these repetitions is that Ali deliberately wants to make a link between Hasina and the characters of Jane Eyre and Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. In a famous scene in *Jane Eyre*, Jane paces back and forth on the roof of Thornfield Hall, considering her own situation. From the top of the roof Jane can look “afar over sequestered field and hill, and along dim sky-line” (Brontë 125). Seeing her own “narrow” life in a wider perspective like this, she reflects upon her role as a woman, and finds out that she dreams of something more than financial security and “making puddings and knitting stockings” (Brontë 126). She is restless, she is curious and she wants to explore the world around her:

...I longed for a power of vision which might overpass that limit; which might reach the busy world, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen: that then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with variety of character, than was here within my reach ... Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; (Brontë 125)

Like Jane, Hasina reflects upon her life and possibilities on her visits to the roof. However, in contrast to Jane’s more philosophical thoughts, Hasina’s reflections are influenced by the everyday struggle for food and shelter. Hasina also has very different views from her roofs than Jane had at Thornfield Hall. Still, these women have something in common: they both feel trapped in a world dominated by men. From her roof in Dhaka Hasina can see a crippled beggar woman lying in the street: “Body is snap shut. If she sit on behind she can look only at ground. It like big big foot press on the back” (58). Every evening a man comes and collects her and on one occasion the woman refuses to go with him. One interpretation of this image can be that the man has crippled her or is taking advantage of her.

In this case the “big big foot” can be seen as male power which makes her suffer, both physically and mentally. On the psychological level, the foot which presses her down can be seen as a symbol of oppression due to gender, and that the poor woman lives in a hopeless situation from which she cannot escape. Hasina finds this woman to be full of courage and she admires her. Thus, similar to Jane, Hasina considers her possibilities regarding living a life independent of a man in a patriarchal society. Through this parallel Ali wants to emphasize that women have suffered from gender discrimination throughout history in all parts of the world. In particular, she wants to focus on the difficult situation for women living in Third World countries and the various oppressions they have to face.

The link Ali makes to *Jane Eyre* is also important for another reason, as she draws attention to the question of imperialism. Like Hasina, Bertha, Rochester’s wife, is a woman from the colonized world. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane and Bertha are presented as very contrasting figures. Spivak relates this difference, “the otherness”, to the question of colonialism. She further defines this relation as “Europe and its not-yet human Other” (Spivak “Three Women’s Texts” 247), where Jane represents the civilized, organized and powerful England (Europe) and Bertha the uncivilized and “wild otherness” - the Third World and colonized countries. The feminist critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have also made an extensive analysis of *Jane Eyre*, but in contrast to Spivak, only seen Bertha in psychological terms as Jane’s “dark double”, a manifestation of Jane’s dark side. However, Spivak criticises this interpretation and claims that she will “...develop the suggestion that nineteenth-century feminist individualism could conceive of a ‘greater’ project than access to the closed circle of the nuclear family” (Spivak “Three Women’s Texts” 248). Through this, Spivak clearly wants to illustrate the difference between the Third World and the West, a universal subject which Ali and Desai have in common in their novels. Thus, in the same way as Bertha struggles for a respectable life in *Jane Eyre*, Hasina tries to establish a decent, independent life in today’s Dhaka.

Sai in a gender perspective

Sai, in *The Inheritance of Loss*, appears to be a strong young woman who trusts her own decisions. With her westernized influence she grows up as an educated, reflective “child of nature”, favoured by the money and the position of her grandfather. Her harsh experiences from the convent and her difficult family situation make her into a confident and independent girl. Also, in the relationship with her grandfather, she seems to balance, and in many situations she proves to be the most capable in the Cho Oyu household. Already in the first

chapter of the novel this is confirmed. During the robbery at Cho Oyu Sai appears capable, calm and brave compared to the judge and the cook. Usually, the judge is the dominant and powerful part who makes the decisions on behalf of others, but now he is forced to lay the table for the robbers and he is humiliated and mentally hurt. He has no power to change the frightening situation they are in. When the cook hides under the table and the robbers drag him out, Sai exclaims: “‘He hasn’t done anything, leave him’ said Sai, hating to see him humiliated, hating even more to see that the only path open to him was to humiliate himself further” (5-6). Thus, in this situation the gender roles are switched, and Sai seems to be the one with control. Sai’s strength is further exemplified through her relationship with Gyan, in which she fully proves to be his equal. Throughout their conflicts, Sai appears faithful to her opinions, and she does not give in due to love or soft feelings. Actually, she is furious with him because of his loyalty to the GNLF, and several times she confronts him in order to make her points clear. Hence, in this respect she is very different from her grandmother Nimi, Nazneen and Hasina, who as young women are suppressed in their relationship with men. Thus, Sai represents a strong woman in a Third World perspective. Her westernized lifestyle naturally makes her more easily adapted to a postcolonial setting.

Unlike Hasina and Nazneen, Sai is not influenced by strong religious and cultural traditions. As mentioned, she is caught between two different traditions, the East and the West. As a result, she feels uncertain regarding her own identity and traditions. Due to this, and in contrast to her grandmother, the question of “an arranged” marriage is never discussed. On the contrary, she is encouraged by Noni (68) and Mrs. Sen (132) to grasp love before “the craze will go” (132). This view is not unusual in today’s India. Even though proven robust, the institution of “arranged marriages” has no legal status according to the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 or the Special Marriage Act of 1954 (Uberoi 24). Additionally, since “love marriages” do not require dowry, many parents have welcomed this solution (Uberoi 24). As most of the people in Sai’s little world are influenced by a Western culture, none of them follow the traditional Hindu way of thinking about marriage. Noni also encourages Sai in general to believe in herself, and to try her utmost to fulfil her dreams: “‘if you get a chance in life, take it’ ... ‘You must do it on your own, Sai’” (69). Hence, it seems that Sai’s possibilities to develop are limited due to other aspects than gender. Finances seem to be her main challenge and concern. As in the case of Gyan, education is no guarantee to getting a “proper job” or a job at all. The best Sai can hope for is to inherit some money from her grandfather. However, these future prospects do not stop her from dreaming about an independent life. Like Hasina and Nazneen, and like Jane Eyre many years ago, she is restless

and longing to participate in the world around her: “She’d have to propel herself into the future by whatever means possible or she’d be trapped forever in a place whose time had already passed” (74).

The issue of gender in *Brick Lane*

Returning to *Brick Lane* and London, there are still some gender issues to be discussed. The reader becomes acquainted with a wide range of characters, in particular Razia, Hanufa and Jorina. These women have several aspects in common. First of all, they are all immigrants in England due to marriage. It is important to be aware that they have not made the decision to leave their home country out of their own free will. They also live in a “closed” Bangladeshi community with husbands who want them to fill traditional roles as wives and mothers, as would have been natural if they still lived in Bangladesh. This issue turns out to be challenging for all of them. After some time, they are able to see the English society around them and they see the western habits of many women working outside their home earning their own money. In short, they understand that in this country it is both possible and realistic to live a life independent of a man. After a while, when they have settled and have been observing the society around them, they start longing to participate in their new cultural setting. They want to learn the language, they want to “go out”, and they want to improve their financial position. However, they also have common worries: the problematic issue of raising their children in a bi-cultural world, the frequent drug abuse among the boys in their community, and the difficult questions regarding “arranged marriages” and “love marriages”. Do they want to stick to their traditional Bangladeshi background or do they want to adapt to the culture of the West? Through her descriptions of these female characters, Ali states that a combination of the two is both possible and recommended. It is possible to take pride in one’s original culture and at the same time approach a new one. However, Ali does not conceal that this process is both problematic and challenging, as these women are often discriminated against both due to gender and race.

Razia exemplifies these issues. She is eager to create an independent life and, like Nazneen, to approach her new culture. She is deeply frustrated about her husband, who makes decisions regarding them both and who decides to send most of the money he earns back home (96). Consequently, she feels a victim of his power: “He keeps me locked up inside.” ... “If I get a job, he will kill me” (123). Unlike Nazneen, she is tired of “taking little bird steps” (95). Razia’s struggle as a woman is emphasized by her physical appearance. She has “man-size hands” (27) and a “man-size mouth” (68) and “There was nothing feminine about

her face, and with her hair tucked into her hat she could have been a labourer or a fisherman” (72). Furthermore, the sari looks strange on her (27). Razia’s male features increase together with her psychological process towards independence and a westernized lifestyle. Her sari is soon exchanged for trousers, track suits and a Union Jack T-shirt. She also cuts her hair short. When Razia’s husband dies in an accident, Razia proves to be a strong woman who in spite of gossip and ignorance from those around her, dares to be herself and to take full responsibility for her family. In this respect she is much like Hasina. As a widow Razia first starts working at a garment factory, thereafter she establishes her own sewing business - a task she seems to be capable of. Thus, once again, Ali emphasizes how strong and capable these women are if only they get the chance. In contrast to their husbands, Nazneen, Razia, Hanufa and Jorina had no ambitions or dreams when they first arrived in England. However, they soon find out that their new country has something to offer, and they start to fight for freedom and a better future. In this respect, they end up more satisfied than their husbands. Compared to them, the women never give up working for their aim.

Mrs Islam is not one of the major characters in *Brick Lane*, yet she is still important. She is different from the other female figures discussed so far, and can be characterized as an “atypical” Bangladeshi woman for several reasons. Unlike the other women in *Brick Lane*, Mrs Islam is not oppressed by a man. In fact, she is the one with power and control herself - professionally, socially as well as privately. Once she tells Nazneen that “‘If you think you are powerless, then you are’” (65). Together with her two sons she runs the brutal but monetarily rewarding family business of usury, often employing harsh methods to obtain her financial “agreements”. When her husband was alive he used to front the business, but the brains of the company belonged to her (98). Also socially, Mrs. Islam has the powerful role as the leader of the female Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane. She is the first one to call upon Nazneen after her arrival in London. Besides, she has been living in England for nearly thirty years, and she knows “everything about everybody” (28). Through gossip and knowledge about the most sensitive matters in the various Bangladeshi households, she is able to control the women in the neighbourhood. The fear and consequences of being excluded from this community are serious, and therefore the women do their utmost to stay within the existing system. The fact that Mrs Islam does not make any effort to withdraw herself from public view, together with her illegal business, signal that she feels superior to the other women and that religious and cultural matters do not stop her. She is only interested in her own situation and success.

Through this character, Ali wants to draw attention to a woman who does not fit into the traditionally defined role of a woman, or rather, how men in general prefer women to be. At the surface she plays the role as an old, kind woman who, in spite of her bad health, makes an effort to support the other women in various ways. However, she really is a cynical usurer, pressing people for money and controlling the females in the community. She has the power to exploit the people around her in a cruel way. Both Nazneen and Razia become her victims, as they experience exclusion from the community for certain periods. Further, Ali wants to give a picture of a woman who is not a “saint” or an “angel”, like Amma, who sacrifices herself for others. The feminist critic Toril Moi has described this psychological state like this: “But behind the angel lurks the monster: the obverse of the male idealization of women is the male fear of femininity. The monster woman is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who *has* a story to tell – in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her” (Moi 58). This suggests that behind the figure of the female angel, there is a dark side which does not show. It is important to understand that women are not only “angels” or “saints”, but, like men, they have darker sides and are individually different. Mrs Islam fits into this pattern.

The male characters and their masculinity

Finally, it will be interesting to end where the discussion started, with the definitions of gender given by Puri and Trinh. More specifically, the masculinity of some of the male characters will be in focus. Based on these definitions, it is interesting to note how the defined roles of “male” and “female” approach each other, and how these effect gender issues. This has already been touched upon in the case of some of the female characters. Both Razia and Mrs Islam have, in different ways, characteristic features which are not always considered “female” from a male point of view. This phenomenon is also visible with respect to some of the male characters. Karim and Gyan represent strong, powerful males, and their masculinity is proven through their heroic actions of “changing the world” by joining political groups. In contrast to this, the reader is introduced to the “less masculine” character of Biju. He works in kitchens, traditionally a female occupation, and he behaves passively in several situations. He seems to have no sexual desires or love affairs. In the end of the novel, he returns home in women’s clothing. The picture Desai draws of Biju corresponds with the theories of Said and Hwang, where Biju’s passive nature and failure to succeed in America fits into the picture of a feminized, oppressed East and a dominant, powerful West. However, the novel also gives a picture of a more complex character. The judge is presented as masculine and strong at the

surface, but deeper down he behaves cowardly in many ways. In England for example, he never stand up for himself. In the end, when he is desperately looking for his dog, he is called “madam” by the police. The wig and powder he wears are also “feminine”, even though the judge needs the wig for professional purposes. In the judge’s case then, “masculine” and brutal features are hiding a sensible and hurt inner life, which again links up with the previous discussion of race-related matters. Thus, also in this case the views of Said and Hwang prove relevant on a deeper psychological level. These examples illustrate that most people have psychological features of the opposite sex in their personality. Furthermore, these individual characteristics are important to consider when discussing gender roles and gender identity as they naturally influence how an individual thinks and behaves. Definitions based on physical or genetic sex alone are therefore not always sufficient when discussing the traditional roles of men and women.

2.3 Concluding remarks

In their novels both Ali and Desai discuss the oppression women from the Third World often have to face. Common for the women presented in Ali’s novel is that they want to improve their lives and free themselves from old traditions and viewpoints, predetermination linked to their religion, patriarchal thoughts and male dominance. They are not satisfied with survival alone - they want something more and they never give up working for their aim. Nazneen is an example of this. She develops from being a young, passive, obedient girl to become a mature, independent woman who trusts her own decisions. Together with the other women in Brick Lane she realizes that her new life in England provides possibilities she would not be able to obtain in Bangladesh. Hasina experiences many difficulties trying to create an independent life in Dhaka, but still she is determined to use her free will and make her own decisions. Desai is more pessimistic in her discussion. Through the character of Nimi she portrays a woman who is so harmed by suppression that she does not have the strength to fight for her dignity and freedom. Desai’s description of Sai, however, shows a strong young woman in modern India, who still needs strength to create an independent life in a demanding society characterized by poverty, political instability, violence and corruption.

Ali’s shift of setting, London and Dhaka respectively, is interesting in a gender perspective. Although many of the female characters who migrate to London are oppressed in their marriage, they do not have to face financial worries in order to survive. In general terms, Nazneen, Razia and the other women in Brick Lane are more capable of creating an

independent life in dignity than their sisters in Bangladesh. They experience the possibilities women in England have regarding making their own money and making their own decisions. Influenced by the lifestyle of western women they are gradually able to free themselves from their husbands and find their own way. Hence, in most cases the female Bangladeshi immigrants in London are suppressed due to gender alone. In contrast, Ali draws a picture of the female characters in Dhaka. In addition to being discriminated against in their relationship with men, these women also have to face poverty. For Hasina, her female colleagues at the factory, Monju and the crippled beggar woman, the major aim is to cover basic needs. Thus, these women are suffering both due to their gender, their low social position in society and their race, in terms of not being able to benefit from the development and privileges of the West. Through the character of Nimi, Desai also draws a picture of a Third World woman who is in a very difficult situation. Although she is privileged by the wealth of her husband, she is still severely discriminated against, as the judge has an immense need to suppress her in the same way he was humiliated himself in England. The judge's hate for himself and his own nationality also makes him hate Nimi simply for being Indian.

Religion, cultural aspects and traditions are closely linked themes in *Brick Lane*. In particular, Ali is interested to show how Islam is related to the concept of gender. Through the character of Amma, and Nazneen's cultural heritage from her, she illustrates how difficult life becomes for those women who lean too far towards predestination. Ali also exemplifies how women from the Third World often are suppressed by men due to their interpretation of Islam. For the majority of female characters in both Dhaka and London, their husbands tend to use Islam and old traditions as an excuse, or as a weapon, to maintain their leading position in the relationship. In this way they can prevent their women from "going out" and taking part in the modern world. On the other hand, through the character of Nazneen and Hasina, Ali shows how Islam can be interpreted and practised in a sensible way - as a comfortable and soothing support. Interpretation is therefore the vital criteria for how religion is practiced. Thus, also in this chapter about gender, it becomes obvious that power is closely linked to oppression.

In my discussion I have tried to place the knowledge of gender and oppression into a historical perspective, by comparing this situation of today to the position of the English character of Jane Eyre in 1847. This comparison is interesting, as it reveals that even back in Brönte's time, women could live an independent, respectable life in England earning their own money as a governess. Thus, whereas women from the Third World are often discriminated against due to race, gender and religion, women from the West have had to face

suppression due to gender alone. Consequently, women's struggle for freedom and equal rights is far ahead in the West compared to women's liberation in the East.

In accordance with traditional postcolonial views, the thought of a strong, developed, West associated with masculinity, and a submissive, obedient, and poor East linked to femininity, seems to be relevant for the theme of gender. However, both Ali and Desai point out that the dynamic and multicultural situation of the world today demands a new way of thinking. Especially, these issues are illustrated through the immigrant experiences in both London and New York in the two novels. Naturally, this development also influences the traditional stereotypical views of gender roles.

Both Ali and Desai illustrate the mental strength of their female characters. Except for the case of Nimi in *The Inheritance of Loss*, their positive and optimistic view of life seems to be prevailing throughout all difficulties. In many cases the lives of the immigrant women in Brick Lane turn out to be more satisfying than their husbands'. They arrived with no ambitions, but grasped the chances as they turned up. Their husbands, however, often felt disappointed with the country they thought should fulfil their dreams. Chanu exemplifies this: for him the return to Dhaka is his end, as he thereby has to leave what he loves the most.

Finally, it is interesting to indicate what kind of feminist message the two novels communicate. Both Ali's and Desai's project is to give voice to subaltern women who have been silenced through history. Through this mission they make the stories of poor Third World women known. This knowledge is valuable information for privileged white people, in order to be able to understand and help in the best way possible. Furthermore, their message is evidently that women must never give up fighting for freedom and respect, in spite of their suffering and difficulties. They must struggle to free themselves from male power and try to obtain the same rights as men. This requires that they "go out" and participate in society. Education and work are factors which will make them stronger and independent in this respect.

Chapter 3: The Theme of Class

3.1 Introductory Remarks

In the analysis of *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss* the theme of class is complex, as it varies from community to community and in time. This is particularly important as the class concept needs to be approached from two different points of view, from the West and the East. In general terms, and in the western tradition, the word "class" means a social division. The Latin word "classis", a division according to property of the people of Rome, came into English in its Latin form. The development of class in its modern social sense, with relatively fixed names for particular classes (lower class, middle class, upper class, working class and so on), belongs essentially to the period between 1770 and 1840, which is also the period of the Industrial Revolution and its decisive reorganization of society (Williams 60-69). The various characterizations, names of classes and levels of each class, or rank, are still being discussed. In its simplest form class can be defined as a "system of ranks in society" (Hornby 153) or as hierarchical differences between individuals or groups in a given society. Factors which are often linked to social ranks are access to money, usage of money, work, education, political interest, lifestyle, neighbourhood and social connections. Thus, the concept of class is complex. André Béteille, a professor at the University of Delhi and one of India's leading sociologists and writers, describes his experiences like this:

From my teaching I learnt that there were alternative, even conflicting, conceptions of class in the sociological literature. Some defined class as an aspect or dimension of social stratification and spoke of 'economic class', 'political class' and 'social class'; others defined it in opposition to stratification. Some defined it in terms of income, occupation, and education, and others in terms of property and wealth. The Marxists had their own canonical conception of class and were intolerant of any deviation from it. But I gradually learnt, as much from my teaching as my research, that the canon concealed many ambiguities. (6)

Béteille also says that "Definitions of class have varied and changed in part because the reality on which they seek to focus attention itself varies and changes" (283). However, in the twentieth century, a distinction has been maintained between the Marxist approach to social structure, social conflict, and social change, and the approach of liberal sociologists. The Marxist approach has given primacy to the analysis of classes. Liberal sociologists, on the other hand, have worked with more variable and more flexible conceptions of class. Sometimes, the concept of class has even been abandoned from their analysis (Béteille 284).

There are significant differences regarding living standards and the access to money in the two novels. First of all, the difference is distinctive between the East and the West, but Ali and Desai also point out that there are differences in class within every small unit of society. Most of the characters from India and Bangladesh experience materialistic privileges in various ways in their meeting with the West, in terms of education, work and modern facilities. Hence, the distinction between former colonizers and colonized countries is important when discussing the themes of class in the two novels, in particular in connection with the migration which takes place. This is further supported by the authorial techniques of telling two parallel stories. However, it is important to be aware that class can also be an abstract inner feeling in terms of class identity and class consciousness. The psychological aspects of class-related issues are therefore of major importance when discussing the theme. Throughout history, difference in social class has been related to problems like power, greed, desire, envy, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and violence. In *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*, the reader is introduced to people from different levels of society, and the following analysis will focus on how these characters react and feel regarding this social difference. In the western tradition the division of classes has been centred on higher/upper, middle and lower, where high represents the very rich, and low the poor. Between these three main categories there exist a variety of smaller class units, but, in this analysis, the main categories will be sufficient in most cases.

India has its own system of dividing society into various stratifications: the concept of caste. Today, the English word caste is commonly used to denote any one of the numerous endogamous social groupings of India, despite the fact that it does not correlate with a single term found in the languages of South Asia. Indeed, the origin of the word caste can be traced to the Portuguese traders and voyagers who visited the Indian subcontinent in the sixteenth century. Upon reaching India, the Portuguese were confronted with a complex social order, and they theorised that the basic unit of categorisation for this society was the *casta*, a Portuguese word meaning clan, tribe or race. When the British later adopted the word *casta*, they limited the scope of their word caste to apply exclusively to the divisions within Hindu society. Thus, the word caste must be understood as primarily denotative of groups within Hindu society. While *casta* and caste were how the European colonial powers were aware of the hierarchical aspects of Hindu society, the Sanskrit tradition had recognised such stratification since the Rgveda (Cush 133-134). While the term *varna* refers to the four classes of vedic society, the term *jāti* ('birth') refers to those endogamous sections of Hindu society which we know as 'castes'. Castes are arranged in a hierarchical structure in any region, with

the Brahmans at the top and the Untouchables (Panchamas) at the bottom. Between these are wide arrays of other castes. The caste hierarchy is based on the polarity between purity and pollution, the Brahmans being the most pure, the Untouchables the most impure. The caste of any individual is inalienable; it is a property of the body and cannot be removed. There are strict rules of caste endogamy and commensality (Flood 58-59).

The relationship between caste and class in India is complex. Most sociologists studying social stratification in rural India have emphasized the hierarchical division into caste, and some have argued as if that represented the system of stratification as a whole. However, when these studies have been examined more closely, it has been found that there are many aspects of inequality in India which cannot be fully explained within the framework of caste. The investigation leads to other important dimensions of social stratification, like ownership, control and use of land. B  teille concludes that it is not only the relationship between class and caste which is a very subtle and complex phenomenon, but class itself (189). However, the ownership, control, and use of land are not the only bases of inequality and conflict in rural India. Caste and other forms of ethnicity based on religion, language, and provenance are also important (B  teille 305).

To go into all of these issues will be too extensive for this thesis. Neither will it be necessary, as my focus will be on psychological aspects. My purpose will be to explore the differences between the social ranks of the various characters based on “high” and “low” rather than systems. What interests me is how the characters in the two novels think and behave based on their rank. Thus, the concept of class will be discussed as the term is normally understood in the West. This will also comprise the class issues described in Bangladesh and India. Like India, the concept of class has proven difficult to define in Bangladesh. Throughout history Bangladesh has been influenced by other cultures and nations, including Britain. In these systems there are several definitions of the various levels in the class structure, but in this thesis the terms “high”, “middle” and “low” will usually be sufficient to promote the meaning. Otherwise, more specific terms will be used. For practical purposes, the traditional terminology of the class concept from a western point of view will also be used for the conditions in India and Bangladesh. In particular, this is important when making comparisons, so that central class terminology like “class,” “class identity” and “class consciousness” can be used without confusing the analysis itself.

The structure and method of the following discussion will be slightly different from the chapters on race and gender. As a consequence of the fact that much of the analysis in this chapter is based on personal characteristics, psychological patterns and plots already debated,

this chapter will also be somewhat shorter. There also seems to be a strong relationship between the three concepts of race, class and gender, and several class issues have therefore already been discussed. This is particularly relevant in the case of Biju, whose social rank in society has been analyzed in the chapter on race. In the same way, class issues regarding the immigrants from the West in Kalimpong, uncle Potty and Father Booty, and the social position of the western-influenced privileged Indians, Noni and Lola, have been commented on earlier. Hence, in order not to repeat myself, the concept of class will be explored through literary connections which are suitable for promoting the theme. Regarding method, the relevant issues will be compared consecutively, with the relationship between the judge and the cook in Kalimpong as a starting point.

3.2 A comparison of the Theme of Class in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*

The judge and the cook: class differences in Kalimpong

All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit (1).

These are the opening lines of *The Inheritance Loss*. In this beautiful setting the reader is introduced to Cho Oyu and the people living there. On the veranda, in the front, Sai is reading an article in *National Geographic*, while the judge is playing chess against himself. The dog Mutt is sleeping peacefully under his chair. This sophisticated scene illustrates the privileged and enjoyable activities of Sai and the judge. Even the dog is able to enjoy the pleasures of life. The magazine Sai is reading suggests an intellectual atmosphere, education and a connection to the West. At the back, however, away from the light and apart from the others, the cook is trying to light some damp wood to make tea. It is obvious that the cook is the servant and the judge the master. By naming these characters by their profession, Desai wants to emphasize the social class difference between them. Hence, the concept of class is established in the very first page of the novel and debated throughout.

The cook is poor. He lives in a mud and bamboo hut on the judge's property. He has only one extra shirt and few other personal belongings. He started to work when he was ten years old, and was hired by the judge at the age of fourteen. From then, the judge and the cook have been living together. The judge has been the powerful master, and the cook the submissive all-around servant - doing his best to fulfil the demanding tasks of the judge with

primitive facilities: “only a corner of the kitchen was being used, since it was meant originally for the slaving minions, not the one leftover servant” (7). The low position of the cook further mirrors how he sees himself: “He was a powerless man, barely enough learning to read and write, had worked like a donkey all his life, hoped only to avoid trouble, lived on only to see his son” (11). In a conversation with Noni, Sai describes the cook and his son as “‘the poorest family in the village’” (67). The communication between the judge and the cook is limited to strictly necessary information and instructions. When the police arrive to investigate the robbery, the cook tries to be a part of the conversation. This annoys the judge, and he says: “‘Go sit in the kitchen. Bar bar karta rehta hai’” (11). This statement is clearly condescending and confirms the difference in rank between them. The fact that the judge gives the order in two languages emphasizes their differences regarding cultural belonging and identity. The use of English suggests loyalty to the former colonizers and the West, while the Indian phrase is used in a patronizing way to maintain the class distinction between them and to make sure that the cook has understood the message. This is one of the few times in the novel a “conversation” between them is rendered. Another example takes place when the cook at one point asks the judge for a raise since his salary had not been changed in years. The judge refuses; he sees the cook’s salary only as “pocket money”: “‘All your expenses are paid for—housing, clothing, food, medicines. This is extra,’ growled the judge” (54). This example shows how easy it is for educated people of high rank to manipulate and take advantage of people from lower classes in society. When Sai arrives at Cho Oyu, the cook is not informed about why she has arrived or that her parents are dead: “‘I’m never told anything’” (25). Thus, there are no signs of friendliness or understanding in their relationship, only a master giving orders and a servant obeying his demands.

However, it is important to mention that the cook also has another side; he can be both creative and show initiative. In spite of his low social status, he is one of the few poor people in the area who finally manages to send his son to America. He has also started his own business selling his own liquor, which is recognized for its fine quality: “It filled him with pride to see men sitting in the steam and smoke with their bamboo mugs full of his grain topped with hot water” (54). This side business of the cook’s irritates the judge, who feels that his leading position is threatened by the cook’s success: “It was his habit to be a master and the cook’s to be a servant, but something had changed in their relationship within a system that kept servant and master both under an illusion of security” (209). Through this description, Desai illustrates that the cook could have made much more out of his life if he was given the chance. She points out how hard it is for a person who belongs to a low social

class to improve his or her situation. The concept of class is therefore a restriction in itself, as it prevents development and progress.

The life of the judge has been a deep contrast to that of the cook's. After his return to India, and based on his education, his membership in the ICS and his profession as a judge, he is able to enjoy a sophisticated life in upper class Indian society. His work has demanded that he travel around in his districts. On these trips he lived a life of luxury which would hardly seem possible considering the efforts and resources required in areas mostly without roads:

through jungly areas and through deeper, swifter currents, he crossed on elephant. We would travel before him in a train of bullock cars piled with the china, tents, furniture, carpets-everything. There were porters, orderlies, a stenographer... We would put up tents in villages all over the district: a big bedroom tent like a top for your grandfather, with and an attached tent bathroom, dressing room, drawing room, and dining room. The tents were very grand, Kashmiri carpets, silver dishes, and your grandfather dressed for dinner even in the jungle, in black dinner jacket and bow tie. (60)

This quote shows British upper class standards applied to deserted Indian areas. First of all, the quote confirms the considerable difference between the role of the master and the servant in postcolonial India. The judge's sophisticated way of life naturally required hardworking servants. Secondly, Desai makes fun of formal British customs by placing these habits in the jungle. From the judge's viewpoint, however, his wealth and class identity is important in order to maintain the western-oriented lifestyle he feels he is entitled to and the power he has gained through his profession. Although the wealth and the luxury of the judge gradually decline, his status and position remain the same. This shows how stable and rigid the system of social classes is, and how difficult it is to alter one's starting point.

However, the differences between the cook and the judge are more complex than outwardly apparent. From the judge's point of view, the cook represents everything he hates and cannot accept: he is Indian, uneducated, submissive and belongs to a low class in society. The judge feels superior to him both professionally and personally, and feels it is his right to take advantage of the situation. In accordance with previous characterizations of the judge, it is clear that his use of power is based on his own insecurity, lack of confidence and identity problems. Once when travelling in a court district, the cook had prepared a chicken. He "brought it forth, proclaimed it "roast bastard," just as in the Englishman's favourite joke book of natives using incorrect English. But sometimes, eating that roast bustard, the judge felt the joke might also be on him, and he called for another rum, took a big gulp, and kept eating feeling as if he were eating himself, since he, too, was (was he?) part of the fun..." (62-63). The tone is light and amusing in this quote, but still Desai describes a serious state of

confused identity. From the cook's point of view his employment with the judge has been one of disappointment. He has been brought up in a society where the English have been those with privilege, wealth and power. Coloured by this, along with his low self-esteem, he feels less successful than his father: "A severe comedown, he thought, from his father, who had served white men only" (63). These feelings of the cook also illustrate the racial aspects of class, and how the issues of race and class are linked together. Thus, the relationship between the judge and the cook illustrates how imperialism and the influence from the West have affected the social structures of India.

The inner feeling of class identity is also described in the case of the cook. His low social class and his view of himself as a "low" person influence him to accept disgrace and unjust treatment. Returning to the investigation of the robbery at Cho Oyu, Desai makes it clear that he is treated with prejudice and humiliated. The policemen, being both corrupt and nosey, treat him with no respect: "Unfortunately the policemen seemed perturbed and questioned him harshly while also making their scorn for him clear. As a servant, he was far beneath them" (11) and further: "The police collected their umbrellas and went tramping across to the cook's hut, extra careful, extra suspicious. Everyone knew it was the servants when it came to robbery" (12). Thus, in this scene the cook becomes the victim of prejudice and stereotypical views due to his social class and profession.

However, the most humiliating scene takes place when the dog Mutt disappears at the end of the novel. This loss is unbearable to the judge, who loves the dog more than anyone else. The scene is essential for the cook, who the judge threatens to kill if he does not find the dog. The cook's position as a servant and his low self-esteem make the guilt grow inside him and he starts to blame himself for not having done his job properly. Drunk and in a pitiful state, he therefore knocks on the judge's bedroom door at night, asking for forgiveness and punishment. He also confesses the mistakes he feels he has made over the years. This awakens the judge's terrible anger, and a gruesome and humiliating scene takes place. The judge, blind with anger and hate, "...was beating with all the force of his sagging, puckering flesh, flecks of saliva flying from his slack muscled mouth, and his chin wobbled uncontrollably. Yet, that arm from which the flesh hung already dead, came down, bringing the slipper upon the cook's head" (321). The cook, on the other hand, pleads to be punished and even killed: "'I'm a bad man,' cried the cook, 'I'm a bad man, beat me, sahib, punish me'" (319) and "'Yes', wept the cook, 'that is right. It's your duty to discipline me. It's as it should be'" (320). When Sai enters the room and screams that the judge should stop, the cook replies: "'Let him. He wants to *kill me*. Let him kill me. What is my life? It's nothing. Better

that it's gone. It's useless to everyone'" (320). This passage is about deeper psychological feelings than the punishment connected to the missing dog. It is also a picture of the differences between them and their lack of respect for each other: "The judge and his cook had lived together for more years than they had with anyone else, practically in the same room, closer to each other than to any other human being and-nothing, zero, no understanding" (313). The judge's disgust for the cook based on his race and class is now brought up to the surface and he is no longer able to control his feelings. Due to his social position he feels he has the right to punish the cook in the cruel way he does. Like in the relationship with Nimi many years ago, he once again represents the "white" western-oriented man who uses his position to oppress others to obtain his personal intentions. The cook, on the other hand, fills the role of the submissive and poor man from the East. Again, Desai shows a parallel to the relation between the East and the West in accordance with postcolonial theories.

Sai and Gyan in a class perspective

Sai also fits into the discussion of class in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In the same way as Sai lives between two different cultures, the East and the West, her class identity is ambiguous. Being the granddaughter of the judge she is able to enjoy what is left of his wealth and his high position in society. She gets a private education and does not have any serious financial worries. However, unlike her grandfather, Sai is not class conscious. She is more concerned with maintaining a close relationship with the cook and the other ones around her to fill the empty space of her dead parents. In particular, she wants to keep the cook for herself. She is therefore very happy when it becomes clear that Biju is leaving for America: "If his son were around, he would pay only the most cursory attention to her. She was just the alternative, the one to whom he gave his affection if he could not have Biju, the real thing" (187). As a person she is kind, sensible and warm-hearted and tries to help out whenever she can. Hence, class differences do not matter to her, as long as she and her closest acquaintances are able to live a reasonable life in dignity. Sai shares this view of life with most of the female characters in *Brick Lane*. The main focus of both Nazneen and Hasina is to develop close and caring relationships with family and friends rather than paying attention to social standard and materialistic privileges. So, in spite of the fact that the judge thought of her as an "unpaid somebody" (210) who could help out when she first arrived, and that Noni thinks that without herself and Lola, "Sai would have long ago fallen to the level of the servant class herself"

(67), Sai proves to be herself regardless of social class. Thus, in the same way as her identity is to be found between two cultures, her class is also something “between”.

Sai and the cook grow close over the years. Therefore it really hurts her to see the cook hurt and humiliated. Though they both sense that they are different in terms of class and cultural background, Sai remains kind and understanding with regards to the cook’s situation. The humiliating scene with the police inquiry after the robbery therefore really upsets her. When the police throw around the few possessions the cook owns and also read his letters from Biju, leaving them in a heap on the floor, Sai becomes angry on the cook’s behalf. At the same time, she also feels awkwardness and shame. This situation reminds her of the difference between them and the embarrassment she feels when she occasionally enters the cook’s living quarters. The cook on the other hand seems to accept their rude and degrading manners as a part of every-day life: “‘They had to do it’ said the cook. ‘This is a serious matter’” (225). This shows the cook’s humble attitude towards the authorities and how he feels “low” compared to them. Sai’s warm feelings for the cook and her anger on his behalf when he is humiliated make another parallel to the relationship between Nazneen and Hasina in *Brick Lane*. Also Nazneen feels deeply frustrated for not being able to help her sister.

The relationship between Sai and Gyan illustrates contrasts both regarding ethnic background and difference in social position. While Sai is among the financially privileged, Gyan and his family are struggling to survive. At first, naturally, they are only vaguely aware of their social differences. However, small signs, like the fact that he eats with his hands and she with a spoon, suggest that there *is* a difference: “Noticing this difference, they had become embarrassed and put the observation aside” (140). It is when Sai goes to find him after a serious fight, that Sai realizes how different they really are and how little she knows about his background. After a two-hour walk Sai reaches the poor part of Kalimpong which is “quite foreign to her” (254). At first sight the little homes in Gyan’s neighbourhood look pretty to her, but

Sai knew that once the day failed, though, you wouldn’t be able to ignore the poverty, and it would become obvious that in these homes it was cramped and wet, the smoke thick enough to choke you, the inhabitants eating meagerly in the candlelight too dim to see by, rats and snakes in the rafters fighting over insects and birds’ eggs. You knew that rain collected down below and made the earth floor muddy, that all the men drank too much, reality skidding into nightmares, brawls, and beating. (255)

When Sai finally finds Gyan’s home she is surprised:

The house didn’t match Gyan’s talk, his English, his looks, his clothes, or his schooling. It didn’t match his future. Every single thing his family had was going into

him and it took ten of them to live like this to produce a boy, combed, educated, their best bet in the big world. Sisters' marriages, younger brother's studies, grandmother's teeth-all on hold, silenced, until he left, strove, sent something back. (256)

These quotes are important because they describe the poverty of Gyan and his family, and the enormous pressure he must feel in order to succeed and live up to the expectations of his parents. He is their investment for a better future. The quotes also show the significant difference to the living standard and material privileges at Cho Oyu. Finally, and in a gender perspective, the reference illustrates the male privileges in Gyan's home. Seeing this, Sai suddenly feels ashamed. She now realizes why Gyan has kept her away from his home and family. She also sees how oppression due to ethnicity and class can influence the human mind. Gyan, on the other hand, feels both ashamed and scared thinking about his betrayal, and understands that he really does not belong with the GNLF movement: "There were those who were provoked by the challenge, but Gyan was finding that he wasn't one of these" (260). However, like Karim in *Brick Lane*, Gyan feels that he has to be masculine and strong and fight for independence and better living conditions for his own suppressed people. Thus, through the description of Gyan's betrayal of Sai, Desai emphasizes what poverty, financial inequality and discrimination can lead to, both on the personal level and in a universal perspective. It is anchored in the feeling of being discriminated against and unjustly treated.

Class differences in the Third World

It is interesting to compare the relationship between the cook and the judge in India with that of Hasina, Lovely and James in Bangladesh. The two narratives have many aspects in common and some differences. Lovely and James, a young Indian couple, find Hasina in "the House of falling women" run by a religious organization from Canada (220). The very name of the hostel suggests the humiliation and low position of the women living there. The background for the employment is that one of Lovely's friends, with whom Lovely always compares herself and competes with, has found another woman there for a servant. Hence, the main reason for Lovely to employ Hasina is to signal "goodwill" and charity towards her peers, which is important for her image. Furthermore, it is a way to improve her own social status in Indian society. She has no feelings for Hasina as a person or what she has been going through. Hasina is a strong, hardworking young girl, who hardly costs her anything to keep. From Hasina's point of view, her job is a new opportunity, and she is naturally deeply grateful: "How much I have to praise for Him! How much He have given me! All times I making mistakes, all times I going off from straight Path and He is giving chance again and

then again. Here is for me another chance” (220). She is also fully convinced that Lovely has employed her out of pure kindness. The fact that Hasina is so grateful, humble, and feels “low” in society makes her easy to exploit by her masters.

Like the cook in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Hasina is suppressed in her job. Her main duties are taking care of the two children, cleaning, shopping and running errands. Her working days are long and her living conditions are poor. She sleeps on a shelf in a cupboard, and even at night she is on duty, taking care of the youngest child. The cook in the house, Zaid, sleeps on the kitchen table. Hence, in this respect their living conditions can be compared to those of Biju in New York, who works illegally. Still, of course, Hasina finds it a “good position”, in light of what she has experienced earlier. Also, the cook in *The Inheritance of Loss* is grateful for having a job at all. Thus, Hasina’s position and the cook’s employment with the judge keep them safe from starvation and extreme poverty. Being aware of their low rank in society, they both accept and appreciate their poor living conditions, knowing that the alternatives are much worse. Through these examples, Ali and Desai illustrate the poverty that many people from the Third World have to face. Furthermore, it is important to be aware that Lovely and James could have provided better living conditions for Hasina if they wanted to. In this respect there is a parallel to the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*, both households being among the privileged in their respective countries. It is their class consciousness, their selfishness and their attitudes towards the poor that prevent them from doing this.

The life and social rank of Lovely and James are strikingly different from that of Hasina’s, in the same way as there is a major difference between the judge’s and the cook’s. Like the judge, their lifestyle is deeply influenced by the West. They live in a respectable and upper class neighbourhood, and their generous house is equipped with wooden furniture and facilities up to western standards. The various rooms in their home are named in English terms (221) and they call their children “darlings” (223). However, their link to the West can first and foremost be illustrated through the changing of their Indian names into the English Lovely and James. This decision symbolizes the denial of their true identity and the desire to take on a new one. In this respect they are like the judge. Like him, Lovely and James are also class conscious. Their need for status symbols is inside them, always trying to impress others. However, their sophisticated lifestyle hides their true identity and their inner life. They always seem friendly and kind on the surface, but deeper down they are not as well-meaning and warm-hearted as they appear. James works for a company producing plastic bags, which have become a serious threat to the local environment. Lovely is mainly interested in her social

status, her looks and her clothes. The truth is that she is not really comfortable with her own children, neither in practical terms or emotionally. She is too involved in her superficial life. Hence, the main interest of Lovely, James and the judge at Cho Oyu is to get as much work done as cheaply as possible. Due to their social positions and westernized lifestyle they feel they have the right to treat the cook and Hasina as they please. This way of thinking links up with the previous discussions of the theories of Said. Although Lovely, James and the judge are from Third World countries, Bangladesh and India respectively, they feel that their high rank in society and their western loyalty and influence enable them to look at themselves as belonging to the western world, which by Said is characterized as powerful, wealthy and educated. According to this theory they also feel that they can justify a dominant position towards their employees. Hence, in this case Lovely, James and the judge represent the “white”, powerful and controlling West, while Hasina and the cook mirror “the other”, the poor, passive and uneducated people of the East struggling to stay alive. This scenario is closely linked to the issue of race, as Hasina and the cook are also discriminated against for these reasons, in the sense of not trying to take on a western identity. Thus, Ali and Desai illustrate how the themes of race and class are linked and how colonialism has resulted in identity confusion.

The contrast between Hasina and Lovely is of importance also regarding their personalities. Hasina can be characterized as honest, kind, true and well meaning, while Lovely deep down is selfish and class conscious but still pretends to be nice and caring. This contrast becomes obvious through the character and life experience of Monju. While Hasina is living with Lovely, a gruesome story about a young woman, Monju, is revealed. When Monju was a wife of thirteen she gave birth to a boy. Her husband wanted to sell the baby, but when Monju refused to give it up, her husband threw acid on the child. The boy was injured for life, and only surgery can help to ease his pain and injuries. From then on Monju saves all the money she can for surgery. However, when her husband finds out and demands that she give the money to him, Monju refuses again. The result is that he “burns” her as well. At the hospital Monju’s life-threatening injuries and pains are unbearable, still she does not allow that any money is used for herself – she wants all of her savings to be used for her son (332-335). Hasina tells Lovely about Monju’s situation in order to get permission to see her friend at the hospital. She visits her as often she can in the period before Monju dies; she comforts her as best as she can and she spends the little money she has on medical facilities for her. She is a true friend in a very difficult situation. Lovely, on the other hand, reacts differently. She soon decides to help Monju through charity, but on false premises. She is not really interested

in Monju, but rather what publicity Monju's fate can give her. This attitude is strengthened by the fact that while Hasina tells her about Monju, Lovely is busy trying on clothes and looking at herself in the mirror. Now and then she comments like this: "What about Goats for Life? Special project for women only. Only last month UK Academic coming here to study results. Many per cent improvement in these womens motivation and self esteem. How is your friends self esteem?" (333). This quote shows that Lovely really has no understanding of the dreadful misfortune that has happened and for the situation of Monju. In a larger perspective Ali wants to draw attention to the "new" upper class of any Third World country, which mainly consist of privileged people who are deeply influenced by their former colonizer. These people now live a distanced life to their poor countrymen, and they are not able to understand their difficulties.

This scene is brought up in detail to draw a parallel to Spivak's theories regarding women "who can not speak". Monju has been mentioned briefly earlier when discussing the issue of gender, representing the poor women from the Third World who are "silenced", not being able to communicate their difficult situation to the world around them. In this context it is interesting to explore the relationship between Lovely, Hasina and Monju. Even though Lovely is Indian by birth, she has taken on a new identity, that of the West. Through this change she is also influenced by the western culture of not "hearing" the voices of the poor women around her. She is therefore not able to understand Monju's situation. Hasina, however, is able to understand. She has been faced with hopelessness herself, and can therefore easily see herself in Monju's position. She has reflected on women breaking bricks and digging the roads: "All day squatting over red bricks with little stone hammer. So huge pile wait for this little hammers. Like you take teaspoon to empty lake. Most is women and they look hungry" (153). And "The women have big spade and long handle axe. Some carrying basket of stones on shoulder. All thin like sticks. When men work in field at least they have mathlas. These women go bare head (173). Thus, both through her own experience as a prostitute and her reflections, Hasina knows about the alternatives for poor women in Dhaka.

In these examples Ali emphasizes the strong link between social class, gender and race. She also shows that poor women from the Third World are those who suffer the most, as they are triply discriminated against. These thoughts are in accordance with the theories of Spivak, who claims that: "The question of 'woman' seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways" (Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 90). Finally, Ali illustrates how power is the motivating reason for this

oppression. To complicate this picture further and to see it from another angle, Lovely can also be seen as a victim of colonialism. Through her influence from the West she loses her original culture and the understanding of social inequality and injustice - she is no longer able to see the despair of her Indian sisters. However, in order to overcome this state of being cut off from knowledge of “the other”, Spivak has introduced a process where the aim is “unlearning one’s privilege as one’s loss”. In this process privileged women (and men) can try to unlearn what they have been taught from birth regarding race, gender and class, in order to reach a higher level of knowledge and thereby being able to hear the silenced subalterns after all. This is what Ali is trying to do herself. Through the writing of *Brick Lane*, she has been involved in a process trying to understand the suppression and discrimination against the subaltern, putting her earlier knowledge of the themes of race, gender and class aside. This recognition has given her a higher understanding of the suffering of the subaltern, and thereby decreased the gap between them and herself. The publishing of her novel is therefore of major importance; both in terms of giving voice to “silenced” people of the Third World, and to make the western reader aware of the learnt pattern of prejudice against “the other”.

Class issues among Bangladeshi immigrants in London

“Nazneen waved at the tattoo lady. The tattoo lady was always there when Nazneen looked out across the dead grass and broken paving stones to the block opposite” (17). This describes the view from Nazneen’s window when she first arrives in Tower Hamlets in London. The poor life of the tattoo lady who is “always there” and who passes her days by drinking and smoking, indicates an underprivileged community. In more general terms, Brick Lane is described as a dull and miserable neighbourhood, where “the smell from the overflowing communal bins” is pervasive, and, according to Chanu and the Tower Hamlets official statistics, there are “three point five Bangladeshis to one room” (49). The flats tend to have broken heating (50), overflowing toilets and torn wall paper. These descriptions are important, because they illustrate the living standard of the Bangladeshi community in London. As immigrants from the Third World, they belong to the lower classes of English society. In Nazneen’s and Chanu’s little flat there is a lot of furniture; for example a low table with a glass centre and orange plastic legs, and rugs in bright colours made of nylon to make them hard-wearing (20). Nazneen finds the flat beautiful:

Nobody in Gouripur had anything like it. It made her proud. Her father was the second wealthiest man in the village and he never had anything like it. He had made a good marriage for her. There were plates on the wall, attached by hooks and wires, which

were not for eating from but only for display. Some were rimmed in gold paint... She had everything here. All these beautiful things. (21)

However, there is also an element of irony in this regard. To Nazneen, the various things in the flat are not necessarily beautiful in themselves, but they represent the West and she therefore expects them to be beautiful. Hence, the beauty she sees is not really there. The fact is that many of the things in Nazneen's and Chanu's flat are of poor quality, representing the overflow of material goods in the West. Being immigrants, they have no critical objections to western style, in their eyes everything is as it should be.

The backgrounds of Chanu and Nazneen are of significance when discussing their living conditions in London. Several times in the novel it is stated that Nazneen's father was the second wealthiest man in the village (21 and 103). Although the term "wealthiest" refers to different standards in Gouripur and London, the reader never gets the impression that Nazneen and Hasina lacked anything as girls. In fact, it is revealed that they had a servant, (218) and that they had proper clothing and food. Furthermore, their father was able to find an educated husband for Nazneen, living in London. Also, Chanu gives the impression of being reasonably well off before arriving England: "'But I did not come here for money. Was I starving in Dhaka? I was not'"(35).

Based on this background information, it is interesting to have a closer look at Chanu's relationship to the concept of class. First of all, and like the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Chanu is very class conscious. However, in contrast to the judge, who actually fulfils his dreams and obtains power and wealth, Chanu does not succeed as he had hoped. There is a gap between who he really is and who he wants to be. To Chanu, class is connected to wealth, education and the state of being "respectable" or not: "Not many people were 'respectable' enough to call or be called upon" (28). To be "respectable" is for Chanu basically the same as being wealthy, without paying attention to people's behaviour. An example of this is Mrs Islam, who is "respectable" in Chanu's eyes, even though she earns her money in a dishonest way. Chanu's class identity is ambiguous in many ways. He gives a clear picture of who he wants to be associated with and who he does not want to have social relations with. That is one of the reasons why the friendship with Dr Azad means so much to him: "'We intellectuals must stick together,' said Chanu, and he walked with his guest to the door" (35). Chanu feels different from other Bangladeshi immigrants in London and, as mentioned, feels he is the victim of prejudice and stereotyped views: "'And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their

heads. What can you do?” (34). Through this characterization of Chanu, Ali illustrates how people from the West tend to see immigrants from the East in a stereotyped way, as poor peasants with no education or knowledge. These thoughts naturally prevent them from seeing individuality and development among the immigrants. Consequently, it is clear that Chanu’s identity is confused – not only due to race but also due to class. In his case the two concepts are closely linked together.

The concept of class identity raises the question of where in the social hierarchy in London Chanu belongs. He has some higher education, he has a job and he is an immigrant from the Third World. The problematic issue is how immigrants in general are to be defined - do they make up a class of their own, or are they included in the existing hierarchical system? This situation also appears to be unclear for Chanu himself. In the beginning of the novel, through Nazneen, the reader is told that he works for the local council, but it is not clear what he is doing there: “But whenever she asked what he did he gave such a long reply that she got lost in it and although she understood the words, they got together in such a way that their meaning became unclear, or she became confused by them” (44). Chanu often compares himself to one of his colleagues called Wilkie, who according to Chanu belongs to the “white underclass” (38). Chanu also competes with Wilkie in pursuit of a promotion. Chanu sees the situation like this:

...it is the white underclass, like Wilkie, who are most afraid of people like me. To him, and people like him, we are the only thing standing in the way of them sliding totally to the bottom of the pile. As long as we are below them, then they are above something. If they see us rise then they are resentful because we have left our proper place. (38)

This illustrates the fact that immigrants are below the “white underclass”, which, as the name suggests, is a low position in the English social hierarchy. Through this description Ali emphasizes how immigrants from the East often are considered as “low” in the social class system in their new country, regardless of background and education. This fact supports the stereotypical view of “the other” which is often common in the West. Ali also shows how people from the lower classes of the white society often react with violence if they feel that their social position is threatened. Hence, Chanu feels that he is unjustly treated and degraded in this system, having to compete with a colleague with only “one or maybe two O levels” (37) - all due to his skin colour, which determines his social rank.

Compared with Bijju in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Chanu and his family are able to enjoy much better living conditions. They have their own furnished rented flat and they have the benefits of free education and health care in England. In short, they have the freedom to be

visible in their community. As mentioned, Biju does not have these privileges or freedom. He needs to be invisible in order not to be sent back, and he is defined as belonging to the “shadow class” of society. His status as an illegal immigrant makes life very difficult for him. However, apart from these superficial, but important facts, Chanu and Biju share many of the same feelings regarding their respective situations. Chanu makes it clear that he feels discriminated against, both due to his race and his low rank in society. He feels that this is the reason for his failing to get a promotion. In other words, in white English society, Chanu feels invisible. Even though his invisibility is a bit different from Biju’s, he still feels that he is not recognized in the traditional white class system. Nazneen also experiences the state of being invisible in her new country. When she is out on her own for the first time, walking around in the streets of London, she realizes that nobody really sees her: “But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more that she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her” (56). Through these descriptions, Ali emphasizes how people from the West often experience and approach people from Third World countries with indifference, considering them less worthy.

Chanu and Biju are also comparable in another perspective. Due to their failure to succeed, they both return to their home countries with broken dreams, having experienced humiliations and disappointments. Much of the discontent they feel when they decide to return is because they never found their place in the hierarchical class system of the West. Compared to the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*, who succeeds professionally based on his immigrant period in the West, Chanu and Biju return home with no financial gain. They have both lost their pride, and Biju has been robbed of all his possessions. Chanu also loses what means the most to him, his wife and children. Many of their experiences are related to their difficulties of entering the rigid class structure of the West. Thus, also in respect of class structure, Ali and Desai illustrate the presence of white privilege.

Dr Azad, Chanu’s friend, is a Bangladeshi immigrant in London who succeeds professionally. Like the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*, he has the privilege of a recognized education from the West and a profession at the very top of society. He has climbed the social ladder in the “white man’s world”. However, unlike the judge who returns to his home country to practice, Dr Azad manages to build his career in his new country. He can be described as a serious, kind and warm-hearted man who does his utmost to help others. In particular, he is interested in helping young second generation Bangladeshis who are involved with drug and alcohol abuse. He does not seem to be engaged in his own success, but lives a

regular and quiet life. His Bangladeshi wife, on the other hand, experiences England quite differently. She is strongly influenced by the lifestyle of the West, and is interested in showing exactly this to her environment. When Nazneen and Chanu pay an unannounced visit to their home, they are met by the sight of a substantial property in a very respectable area, according to Chanu. In the doorway they meet Mrs Azad: "A woman in a short purple skirt leaned against the doorpost. Her thighs tested the fabric, and beneath the hemline was a pair of dimpled knees. Her arms folded beneath her breasts. A cigarette burned between purple lacquered nails. She had a fat nose and eyes that were looking for a fight" (106). Nazneen and Chanu are shown into the sitting room, which is no doubt expensively furnished, but rather in a "bad" taste, overdoing western style: a pair of snarling tigers that guard the gas fire, golden sofas, a claw-footed table, and "miles" of velvet curtains (108). The tigers and the claw-footed table indicate a style which became popular among the English after the empire. Hence, Mrs and Mr Azad are trying to adapt English upper class style and standard, without really succeeding. Through the characterization of Mrs Azad, Ali portrays a woman who is both westernized and liberated, but who has misunderstood the point and gone too far: she adjusts her underwear with a thumb, she screeches for her husband and she demands her husband to get a beer (108-109).

Although the scene is written in a light and amusing tone, Ali has a message of cross-cultural issues in this passage. Over the last years Mrs Azad's main effort has been to show off her wealth and signal her new westernized identity. However, during the process, she has lost her own Eastern culture and the good relationship she used to have with her husband when they lived in a one-room hovel (113). Hence, the transition to English society has not been easy for any of them. Dr Azad tries to escape his cultural identity problems in books, as "the smell of real life offends him" (113). Hence, in spite of the professional success of both Dr Azad and the judge in *The Inheritance of Loss*, they are not able to find their place in English society and their identities are confused. However, there might also be a possibility that Dr Azad feels discriminated against in his profession. The reader is never told the nationality of his patients, but there are hints which suggest that the majority is of Third World origin. If this is the case, this fact strengthens the notion that he is not recognized among white doctors in London. However, still, Dr Azad prefers to stay on in England, he has lost the dream he once had of returning to Bangladesh. In this respect he is different from his friend Chanu who finally leaves in the end. The consequence is, that for various reasons, neither Dr Azad nor the judge use their western education and profession to help people in their home countries. Also, their wives suffer from westernized influence. From a gender

perspective, it is interesting to see that the prestigious educations of both the judge and Dr Azad had not been possible without financial support from their wives' families. This is expressed with bitterness by Mrs Azad during the visit: "Of course, the doctor is very refined. Sometimes he forgets that without my family's help he would not have all those letters after his name" (113).

Both Dr Azad and the judge are immigrants from the Third World who, through their careers, are able to taste the life of the British upper class. Through their positions in society they also gain the power to influence and dominate others. In this respect, it is interesting to have a look at how these two characters use their power differently, and the consequences of this. Dr Azad, who sees the problems of immigration closely through his work, does his utmost to use his authority and skills to help his patients. Hence, he uses his authority towards something constructive and useful. The judge, on the other hand, whose emotional life has been ruined due to discrimination, is not able to use his professional power in a positive way. On the contrary, his authority creates serious negative consequences in terms of injustice and suppression both privately and in the society. His western influence makes him maintain a law system which favours the privileged, and harms the poor. The judge's behaviour shows how people or groups of people with authority and wealth can control public systems in society, such as law systems, and thereby influence political processes and the distribution of capital. Hence, privilege in social class encompasses the ability to influence others, something which less powerful groups cannot. The empire has played an important role in this respect. When the English gradually took power in India, the former Indian political leaders were replaced by foreigners, who made all important decisions on behalf of the country. In a class perspective, the British created a new powerful upper class with their own people, and the Indians were degraded and humiliated. Thus, the overall points of Ali and Desai are that Third World countries, like India and Bangladesh, have suffered severely from the forced change of power. This situation has delayed and prevented countries of the Third World from development and progress.

3.3 Concluding remarks

Through their novels, both Ali and Desai illustrate that difference in social class exist, and how this inequality in society influences the human mind – both on the individual and the universal level. Social differences also prove to be a reason for oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, based on the discussion of class-related issues, there is a close connection

between social class, access of money, and power. These observations are expressed through characters, plots and descriptions of various communities.

The two author's main points regarding the theme of class are anchored in historical facts about the British Empire, and the change of power which took place in the Third World, in this case represented by India and Bangladesh. However, also after the withdrawal of the English, in the postcolonial period, countries of the Third World have suffered. This period is often associated with financial and political difficulties, injustice in the law system, corruption and violence - all themes which are debated in *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Brick Lane*. Hence, there are close links between historical facts and the various themes in the two novels.

The traditional postcolonial view of a powerful and privileged West and an underdeveloped and oppressed East, is present also when Desai and Ali discuss the issues of class. The various characters of the two texts visualize these universal themes on the individual level. In both novels, those characters who are influenced from the West are those with financial privilege. Thus, in the respect of class structure, Ali and Desai stress the point of white privilege and/or western influence. Access to money and power are the major motivations for the continuous struggle in the competitive class system. Although in different ways, both Ali and Desai describe how the various characters fight in the social hierarchy - some for survival alone, and some in order to obtain better living conditions. Some of the figures aim for the very top.

The theme of class is often related to issues of race in the two novels. These connections are visible between those figures who are influenced and privileged by the West and those who are not. In particular, the relationships between the judge and the cook, Sai and Gyan, and Hasina and Lovely illustrate these contrasts. In the case of the immigrants in London and New York, Ali and Desai describe how characters like Jemubhai, Chanu and Biju are oppressed both because of their low social class and their race. Hence, both race and class are aspects which can lead to discrimination. As the theme of class is the last issue to be dealt with in this thesis, it is now possible to see that some of the characters in the two novels suffer oppression due to their race, their gender and their social class. The fate of Nimi, Hasina and Monju exemplify these patterns.

However, both Ali and Desai point out that difference in social class does not only exist between the East and the West, but within every small unit in society. Desai illustrates this point through the major contrast in living conditions and power between the judge and the cook in Kalimpong, and between Biju and the business men who visit the restaurants where he works in New York - discussing how to develop and exploit Asia. Also, Ali illuminates

these aspects, both through the contrast between Hasina and Lovely in Dhaka and by the destiny of the tattoo lady in Brick Lane - she is white but still not privileged.

Ali and Desai confirm how difficult it is to obtain a higher level in the hierarchical system. Even though class belonging in the western tradition is not considered as “a part of the body”, like in the caste hierarchy of India, the changing of class proves to be difficult for the characters in *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. The exception from this appears when characters from the Third World migrate to the West, like in the case of Chanu and Nazneen, and then automatically experience a better material living standard due to modern facilities. However, in general, it seems difficult for those who migrate from the East to the West to enter the “white” class systems of their new countries. The judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Dr Azad in *Brick Lane* succeed professionally, but the price they pay for their financial privilege is high. Both the concept of class and race prevent them from happiness.

Conclusion

Based on my discussion and comparison in this thesis, I have found that there *are* links between the three themes of race, gender and class in *Brick Lane* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. These links are particularly visible in cases of oppression and discrimination. In most cases the links are between two of the various concepts, for example between race and class or gender and class, but sometimes, all three themes are linked at the same time. Hence, my conclusion coincides with the theory of Spivak, who claims that women from the Third World are the most vulnerable, as they often are discriminated against due to their race, their gender and their class. The concept of power is closely linked to all of the three themes.

To a large extent, the main points of Ali and Desai correspond. They both emphasize the role of the British Empire in South Asia and the difficulties which followed colonialism - both on the universal and the individual level. Hence, they stress the consequences of the postcolonial period, and the fact that colonialism has delayed and prevented Third World countries from taking part in the dynamic development and progress of the West. In the two novels, the various characters struggle to create a future in dignity - both in their home countries, Bangladesh and India, and in the West represented by England and America. These various settings are important for the two authors in order to promote the themes of oppression and discrimination which are of significance for both Ali and Desai. Their main interest is to illustrate discrimination in relation to race, gender and class. In particular, their project has been to give voice to the subaltern women of the Third World, who suffer the most.

My work with this thesis, along with my observations, has been interesting, motivating and increased my knowledge on the subject. Particularly, the theme of gender in relation to Third World women has caught my interest and encouraged me to continue my studies. In order to complete this thesis I would like to draw the attention to the endings of both novels. I feel that both Ali and Desai have a last message to the reader in these final scenes, suggesting what the future will bring - both for their characters and for people of the Third World in general. These prospects are closely linked to the individual changes the various characters experience towards the end.

As mentioned, there seems to be a more pessimistic tone in *The Inheritance of Loss* than *Brick Lane*. However, the last pages of *The Inheritance of Loss* also show glimpses of hope, and I find Desai to be very realistic in her judgement. The humiliating scene with the

judge punishing the cook represents something final, but also something new. This experience makes Sai realize that the time has come to leave, that a change needs to take place. She is able to see herself, her lover, her grandfather and the cook in a larger perspective: "The simplicity of what she'd been taught wouldn't hold. Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it" (323). She also comprehends that she has to make the change herself: "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it" (324). I find this quote to contain promising imagery, such as "golden", "luminous", "light" and "truth". Hence, even though *The Inheritance of Loss* in general ends with "losses" in many ways, it also shows glimpses of hope and optimism. Sai loses her lover, but obtains a higher understanding regarding her future and independence. The cook loses his dignity, but he gets his son back. Gyan regrets his behaviour and promises the cook to find Mutt and bring him back to Sai. Biju, who loses his dignity and his possessions, has a dream to buy a taxi and to drink chhang with his father in the evenings. And the judge, he will again "...sit at his chessboard, and at 4:30, without thinking, from mere habit, he would open his mouth and say, as he always said, "Panna Lal, bring the tea" (323).

This recognition of change, as a personal inner process or "voyage", can be compared to the feelings of several characters in Ali's novel. Towards the end, Chanu finally decides to realize his dream of returning to Dhaka. Hasina is ready to approach something new when she is running off with the cook. Also Nazneen and Sai make related decisions in this respect. Even though Nazneen decides to stay on in England without her husband and Sai wants to leave Cho Oyu, they both want to change their present lives. In the end of the novels they are both confident women who feel they can cope on their own in the world "out there", and they are ready to take the step. Sai experiences the situation like this: "And she felt a glimmer of strength. Of resolve. She must leave" (323).

I would like to end this thesis by invoking what could be called the "ice skating image". This image is referred to several times throughout Ali's novel and expresses her main message in a gender perspective: the importance of believing in one self, to never give up and the significance of being able to live an independent life in dignity. When Nazneen arrives in England as a young woman, she is fascinated by the ice skating shows she watches on television. It seems fantastic to her that people can exercise such control over their bodies. To Nazneen, the ice skaters symbolize freedom and the ability to do what at first seems impossible - it is about total control and believing in oneself. In the last scene of the novel,

Razia and Nazneen's daughters bring Nazneen to a skating rink to surprise her, at first with a scarf covering her eyes. When she is allowed to look she sees the ice: "She looked at the ice and slowly it revealed itself. The criss-cross patterns of a thousand surface scars, the colours that shifted and changed in the lights, the unchanging nature of what lay beneath. A woman swooped by on one leg" (492). The thought of skating is not frightening to Nazneen. She feels strong and confident, and her attempts to enter the ice can be seen as another personal step towards freedom and independence. The image illustrates that Nazneen by now is fully able to appreciate her new life in England. She has proven that she can make her own living for herself and her daughters, and she is proud of it. The fact that she herself is able to decide whether to return to Bangladesh or to stay on in England makes her feel free. She also realizes that she would not be able to experience this freedom in Bangladesh. In many ways the female characters, who had no expectations or dreams before they came to England, are those who turn out to be the most content in the end. The story about Nazneen therefore has a very happy ending. Nazneen is still young when she starts her "new" life: "To get on the ice physically - it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there" (492). For Nazneen anything seems possible now. But could she skate in her sari? Razia gives her the answer: "'This is England'", she said. "'You can do whatever you like'" (492).

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